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Deadline for next Spire submissions:
November 15, 2024



Fall is a great time to get involved ...
Check out pages 8 and 10 for ways you can have fun and
take part in our community!



Caring Contacts

"We respond to your phone calls and emails when you wish to alert us to a need or concern, or when you want to celebrate a joy"

The Caring Network

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Facing Windows ~ Rev. Eric Meter



I'm old enough to remember how the phrase *Stop the World – I Want to Get Off* resonated back in the 60s and 70s. And while I didn't know that the movie by that name was preceded by a play by the same name that had its premiere in Manchester, England in 1961 (thanks, Wikipedia!) before it went on to London, Broadway and Toronto, the phrase has stayed with me, and feels at least as apt as it did then, if not exponentially more so.

As I write this in mid-August the Freedom Convoy trial continues, storms and fires are once again leaving devastation in their wake, politics south of the border are mimicking the plot of *The West Wing*, and our campus expansion plans are about to go before the Ottawa Planning and Housing Committee.

In short, a lot is going on, and even more awaits us on the near horizon.

So, a question for you: how do you keep yourself centered when life seems to be throwing everything your way?

For years, I've relied on both journaling and hiking.

In journaling, I lay out my thinking and feelings and am able to observe, before I share any of it with anyone else, what is in me that calls for expression.

While hiking, there's some degree of exercise amid the larger living world. When I was in seminary, I would often hike the Berkeley hills. One of the loops I took had a very steep section. At first, it felt like my nemesis. Where I had lived in Minnesota, there were no paths that steep. I was left winded, sore and humbled. Yet over time, I came to relish that section. I noticed that as I huffed and puffed up the incline, all my thoughts of this or that evaporated. In those moments there was nothing but my legs, lungs, heart and the rutted incline before me. And then, the summit and the view of San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge. To this day, when I feel challenged, those images return, bringing a bit more juice with them.

Those are what works for me. Again, I'm curious about what works for you. Because these things matter.

What we do and how we spend our time, inform what we learn and how we grow.

All of that is prelude to a recent experience and learning.

Over the years, as demands on my time have grown, I find I'm going out for hikes less often, and now that practice has evolved into the twice daily practice of walking the dog.

As Ann is now in Boston, I've effectively become the single parent of her Miniature Schnauzer, Sammie, who is 13 or so years old. In short, Sammie's teaching me how to age gracefully. But it would take more than just this column to go into detail on that. So I'll simply say that our walks have gotten slower, if not shorter, over the last few years.

During one of our walks earlier this summer, I noticed something surprising. One morning, all of the trash cans that had been by the sidewalks of the little parks nearby (we are ridiculously lucky to have found a place within easy reach of four or more named, if modest, city parks) had been moved into the middle of the parks. Now, sometimes they are mysteriously moved back by the sidewalks, but most often now, they are smack-dab in the middle of grassy fields.

At first, I wondered if one of the neighbours wasn't moving the things on their own to protest dog owners who hadn't been picking up after their dogs as they frolicked in the middle of the grassy parks. But I can't imagine a neighbour having the determination to move so many of the barrels. My suspicion is that the city is trying a new tactic to promote pet waste disposal.

I'll admit I prefer the barrels by the sidewalks. Sammie has never been much for playing fetch or catching frisbees, and is generally more territorial than interested in meeting new friends. Dog parks are wasted on her. As a result, we rarely venture into the grassy centre of our neighbourhood parks.

... continued on page 3

Facing Windows - cont...

. . . continued from page 2

So this has become a little mystery that has defined much of the summer, and it seems it will continue into the fall. While I've been tempted to reach out to Ottawa Parks, the thought of how long I might be left waiting on hold has tempered that notion.

Instead, I've decided to let the mystery be.

Yes, this new placement of city trash barrels is a nuisance, but it's not a problem by any means. And it reminds me of all the many ways I'm really not the

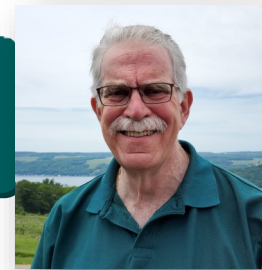
centre of the universe, anyway. Now, when I notice the barrels in the middle of the greenspace, I can't help but think of Sammie and myself remaining on the side of things. And that's just fine. Instead of wanting to leap from the spinning world, we're finding ways to observe what lies before us and smile.

So, what little (or not so little) reminders are the world granting you these days?

In shared faith,

~ Rev. Eric

Splinters from the Board ~ Chuck Shields



Here we are at the beginning of another congregational programming year! I've often thought that September 1st ought to be recognized as the real 'New Year's Day', since most people's lives seem to rotate on a September through June period.

Many have enjoyed a more traditional summer than has been possible since 2020. There have been travels to favourite or bucket-list destinations or to be with family not seen for too long. Others have been back to cottages, but often with the friends and family who have been part of more 'normal' summers.

Meanwhile, there has been lots of activity regarding our campus redevelopment plans. City staff approved our application for necessary zoning changes and the application will be discussed by the City's Planning and Housing Committee on August 28, which means that by the time you read this we all will know whether our proposal will have been referred to the full council for consideration.

Also during the summer we have enjoyed an interesting variety of Sunday services. In years past, the summer became a very quiet time with maybe 40-50 attending a service, but this year we have had around 80 attending on average. In addition to our own congregants, we have welcomed friends from the Fellowship, UU visitors, others passing through Ottawa and newcomers learning what we have to offer. This has added a stimulating sense to Sunday mornings and to coffee hour discussions.

As we enter our program year we can look forward to activities to pull together our congregational community, the children's Religious Exploration Program returning to full swing, all of our choirs participating in services, the Fall Fair highlight of the year and even the annual pledge campaign. I look forward to seeing you at Sunday services and the many activities that make up our regular calendar!

~ submitted by Chuck Shields

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Religious Exploration - RE-flections

~ Jodi McIntosh



Looking Forward, Looking Back: A Year of Growth and Anticipation

Wow, what a year it's been! As I wrap up my first year as Director of Religious Exploration (DRE), I'm excited to share some of the highlights and what we have to look forward to.

Looking Back: A Year of New Beginnings

One of the coolest projects we kicked off was the Story Garden. This idea came to life after seeing the kids from River Parkway Children's Centre playing in our Meditation Gardens. We started by featuring three storybooks in the gardens during the fall, each reflecting our Unitarian principles. This spring, we kept the Story Garden going with a focus on the new UU Values. So far, we've showcased books that highlight Justice and Interdependence. Keep an eye out this fall for more books that reflect our values.

One of the big wins for our program this year was running two age-based classrooms. We were able to offer a curriculum for the older kids (ages 6-12) for the first time since COVID hit. This was all possible thanks to our current families with kids in that age group, new families who've joined our church, and returning families who've come back to FirstU. With all these kids, we made it work! We're really hoping to keep this momentum going.

We also introduced the new Unitarian Values to the kids and the congregation with the help of our friend Jet Pig. Each week, Jet Pig brought a new value to us by planting a seed in our value garden. Thanks to Jet Pig, everyone is now familiar with the values of Justice, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Interdependence, and Generosity.

Looking Forward: Exciting Plans Ahead

Looking ahead, there's a lot to be excited about. In September, the kids in the Rainbow Room will start a brand-new curriculum featuring the video series Ellery Churchmouse, created by J.L. Shattuck. This series, along with its learning guide, will help kids explore spiritual concepts and language through play, connecting these ideas to their daily lives.

In the Chalice Room, we'll continue exploring the seven UU Values that we started last spring, again with the help of Jet Pig. Our fun and creative approach will keep the kids engaged and learning about each value.

We're also looking forward to some changes in our outdoor space this fall. With help from some of the youth in the Ajashki program, we've been building a new play structure that should be ready for the kids to enjoy soon. This is just one of many improvements we hope to see in the future.

We have some special multigenerational services planned for this year. Our first one will be on September 22nd and will be an animal dedication. We'd love for you and your furry, scaly, or prickly pets to join us for this unique and heartwarming service.

Finally we are hoping to offer the grade 4-6 OWL (Our Whole Lives Sexuality) curriculum in January. If you have a child in your life in this age range that would be interested, please contact me to let me know. Also if you are a trained facilitator who is interested in helping offer this curriculum please contact me.

As we look back on a year of growth and forward to a year of exciting possibilities, I'm grateful for the support and enthusiasm of our community. Together, we're creating a vibrant and nurturing environment for all.

Thanks for being part of this journey!

Notable RE Dates this fall:

September 8th – First day of RE classes and RE registration and All Church picnic

Friday September 20th - First Youth Group Meeting and registration

September 22nd – Animal Blessing Multigenerational

October 27th – RE Halloween Party



Musical Interludes ~ Jenn Berntson



As a departure from my usual Spire articles, this fall I wanted to share a little bit about my adventures over the summer. With the support of FirstU, I was able to attend two wonderful conferences, Harbour Voices Festival of Collective Singing Traditions in St. John's, NL and the annual conference of the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries (AUUMM) in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Harbour Voices was an explosion of joyful singing, from the 16 concerts on offer to the informal pop-up singing that happened everywhere from pubs, to hotel hallways, to the streets of St. John's. Some of the performers were ones I have wanted to see forever - like the World Youth Choir, auditioned from 24 countries, and Nathaniel Dett Chorale, a professional vocal ensemble dedicated to Afrocentric music. Some of my favourite performances were from groups I had never heard of before, like Ullugiagatsuk Choir, a children's choir from Labrador with some jaw-droppingly amazing throat singers, and M'anam, a spellbinding Irish/Icelandic a cappella ensemble of men's voices - find them on YouTube, they are amazing! The festival also involved participation in a mass choir of 1400 voices, which rehearsed and then performed with Jacob Collier, an incredible improviser known for his "audience choirs". It was so much fun to sing with him and see him work his magic up close!

In addition, there was an incredible line-up of workshops for participants, with a focus on the intersection of collective singing with racial justice and equity. Some highlights included

Hussein Janmohamed's workshops on pluralism in choral music, Andrew Balfour's on collaborating with Indigenous musicians, and discussion with André de Quadros - known for his work with prison choirs - on using collective singing to cultivate compassion and process trauma. This was the inaugural festival, and I am very hopeful it will be the first of many.

Among choral festivals I've attended, the emphasis on social justice and its openness to different kinds of collective singing - not only the Western European choral tradition - made it unlike anything I've experienced before.

The AUUMM conference was also an incredibly enriching opportunity. It consisted primarily of worship services, workshops, song swaps, and opportunities for socializing and networking. Many events were tailored to the specific needs of Unitarian Universalist music leaders - like reading sessions where we sing through choral music by UU composers, or workshops on our hymnals. There also were informational sessions on upcoming projects of the AUUMM, such as the compilation and production of a new digital hymnal.



The worship services (6 in 4 days!) were amazing and inspiring. It was obvious that much thought and care was put into helping music ministers see and feel firsthand how powerful and meaningful their work can be.

I must say, though, that by far my favourite thing was the opportunity to connect with my colleagues serving at UU churches from around North America (mainly the USA - I was one of only three Canadians). It was so valuable to compare notes with them on our challenges and successes, to have creative brainstorming sessions, and to hear about the paths that had led each of them to UU music ministry. I was constantly amazed by how warm, friendly, and kind everyone I met was, and I have no doubt I forged both professional connections and friendships that will last far beyond the conference's length.

It was so exciting to see the wealth of hope, thoughtfulness, energy, and passion that exists in Unitarian Universalist music ministries, and I returned feeling inspired and reinvigorated!

For more information on the music programs we will be offering this fall, please be in touch with me at music@firstunitarianottawa.ca - I am looking forward to the upcoming season and want to welcome anyone of any interest level or musical background to connect with me.

*With song,
~ Jenn*

Hark! The pledge drive is back!

The annual pledge drive, our fall fundraising campaign, will be starting this year at the end of September. The theme is *Rooted in Compassion, Growing in Community*, chosen to reflect our values. Each fall, we plant seeds for the next year, seeds to create roots to build a just and compassionate world. After several years of demographic sliding, temporary ministers, and COVID, we have recovered. We are now attracting more new members, more children in Religious Exploration, and more youth in our Youth Group. We are growing.

I want to explain the difference between a donation and a pledge. A donation is money, while a pledge is a promise of money in the future. If you are new and have started to donate, thank you. This fall, we will ask you to make a promise to donate next year, in 2025. Pledges are important in helping us to make financial plans for the coming year. The pledge target goes into the 2025 budget, which the congregation will be asked to approve in October, before the pledge

campaign is over, and well before the 2025 donations have started to come in. A pledge is not a legally binding agreement, but it is a promise.

Pledges are the largest single portion of our revenue, more than 60%. The other two large pieces are rentals and fundraising, primarily the Fall Fair. We are entirely self-funding. There is no central body that sends us operating funds. In fact, the opposite is true. We send money to support the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC), about \$120 per year for each member.

We live our values, and welcome people of limited income. You don't need to pledge to be a member, and you don't need to be a member to

pledge. We have developed a small fund, the pay-it-forward fund, to cover the CUC levy for those unable to donate very much. I'm happy to report that last year, the pay-it-forward campaign raised enough funds to cover the CUC levy for lower-income congregants for two years. So, there will no pay-it-forward campaign for 2025, but it will likely be back for 2026

What is our target for 2025? One part, the number of pledges, is decided. Based on our membership, we hope to get more than 200 pledges. As for the dollar total, the team is going to wait. Last year we underestimated the impact of the economic situation on pledges, and overestimated possible pledge totals. So we are going to watch the economy before announcing a dollar target in September.

~ Submitted by Phil Nagy, Pledge Chair, for this year's team: Amy Bérubé, Michelle Jackson, Brent Nicolle, Maury Prevost, and Chuck Shields.



In Memoriam

Our thoughts and sympathy are with these members:

Eleonore and Ray Benesch on the death in late June of their granddaughter, Clara Columbus, daughter of Katrina Benesch.

Joan Crighton on the recent death of her son, Eric, after his long period of illness.



Why do we need a Food Cupboard? FirstU has a diverse community that includes persons on disability, or who work part-time or in low-paying jobs. Did you know that some people in our congregation are living on less than \$1500 per month to pay for rent, food and everything else? When an unexpected expense comes up, it can be difficult to make ends meet. By providing a meal a few times a month, it can help budgeting.

FirstU's Food Cupboard is located in the newly-named Food Sharing Centre (Formerly the Grow Tower Room, Volunteer Centre, Apartment)

beside Fellowship Hall. The content of the Food Cupboard changes weekly because we are constantly receiving donations from our members. We top up the contents once a month using funds from our Social Justice budget. You can check out the shelving, which offers tea, tins of tuna, salmon, soups as well as breakfast cereal, pancake mix, condiments and cleaning supplies. The refrigerator has fresh dairy products, hummus, eggs and produce. The deep freezer offers homemade frozen meals, individual chicken breasts, ground meat and breads.

Want to help? We need donations of all types of food items and bathroom/cleaning supplies. We accept garden produce and homemade meals (such as soups, chilli, lasagna) that are packaged, labelled in individual containers. We also need volunteers to help organize the shelves and to do occasional grocery shopping. And of course, we accept financial donations; please send payments to the office labelled "food cupboard". If you have any questions, please contact: foodshare@firstunitarianottawa.ca.

~ Submitted by Lisa Sharp

Introducing Catherine Pope – the new Fall Fair Director



Hello! My name is Catherine Pope, and I would like to introduce myself as the new Fall Fair Director for the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa.

I would first like to send out a huge Thank You to Carol Card for her hard work and for organizing the Fall Fair since 2019, and her willingness to support me as I learn this job. Thank You, Thank You, Thank You, Carol!!

I have been attending the First Unitarian Congregation for about 14 years now. I have been involved as a volunteer in the Fall Fair for about 8 years.

I was a member of the Peterborough Unitarian Fellowship for the last five years of the 22 years that I lived in Peterborough before moving to Ottawa in 2006 for work.

I have worked in Social Services for over 40 years. For 12 years before retiring, I was the Manager of Cornerstone's Homeless Women's Shelter. Since retiring I have become involved in the local quilting community. Two years ago, I was the Coordinator of the Common Thread Quilt Guild (Orleans/Ottawa) Quilt Show.

In mid-April I met with Carol Card to discuss the responsibilities of the Fall Fair Director as Carol was stepping down from the position. Two major things attracted me to the position.

One was that many of the volunteers who have been Coordinators and Convenors in the past plan to return this year to their positions in the Fall Fair – this will make my job immensely easier. The other thing that impressed me was Carol's amazing organizational skills. These skills are apparent in the information that she has shared with me. The information clearly defines the Director's responsibilities as well as those of the volunteers.

As the Director of the 2024 Fall Fair, I look forward to supporting the staff and volunteers in their efforts to help the congregation continue its work in building positive community, and raising the money needed to continue FirstU's mission.

Get Ready for Fall Fair 2024!!

Mark your calendars for **Saturday, November 16th**! Autumn is in the air and that means that the Fall Fair at FirstU is just around the corner! In a few weeks our congregational spaces will transform into the biggest church bazaar in Ottawa. So, you ask, what can you do to help make the Fall Fair a success? Just do the following:

1. **Gather and sort your surplus goods** so you can bring them to the church starting Monday, November 11th. Housewares, books, toys, clothing, linens, electronics and more will be welcome at that time. Jewellery – even broken pieces – can be brought to the office on an ongoing basis. Check the Fall Fair page on the FirstU website (under Getting Connected/Fundraising) for specific donation criteria. Please make sure that the items are in good condition and are things you would be



tempted to buy yourself. And they need to be small enough and light enough that one person can carry them.

2. **Let your friends and neighbours** know about this opportunity to declutter by donating their unwanted articles for the Fall Fair. Be sure that they know the dates and location of our event so they can come for pre-Christmas shopping. Lots of donations + lots of shoppers = a Great Sale! There will be posters to distribute and other ways to help us get the word out. You'll

also see ways on the Fall Fair page to create Facebook postings to share.

3. **Volunteer!** Volunteering with Fall Fair is a great way to get involved, meet new people and share in the excitement of our congregation's largest fundraiser. There are lots of opportunities available – during the week before the Fair for sorting goods and setting up; on sale day for selling and many other tasks, and the week following for take-down and dispersing leftover goods. Even an hour or two of your time is appreciated!

If you can help out, contact Eva Berringer at:

evaberringer@hotmail.com

Questions? Please email:

fallfair@firstunitarianottawa.ca

~submitted by Catherine Pope



Environmental Action Group (EAG)

The Heritage of Trees

A big tree has been cut down in my neighbourhood as the buildings around it are being demolished for another high rise. My neighbour told me how she loved to look out her window to watch how this tree grew over the years hoping it would be saved yet knowing it would not.

I wondered at the intensity of effort to preserve old and crumbling buildings (Heritage) but not old trees. I checked in the dictionary for the definition of 'Heritage'. Within the listed definition includes “a nation’s buildings, monuments, countryside, etc., esp. when regarded as worthy of preservation”.

City trees may not be considered 'countryside'. However, they are within an urban landscape in parks, along the rivers, and in parts of older city communities where large and mature trees line the streets. Large and mature trees are clearly worthy of preservation and the benefits they provide need to be “regarded as worthy of preservation” when changes to our inner city landscapes are being planned.

I am not comforted by the promises to plant X number of new trees once highrise construction is completed. It is hard to watch the young saplings struggle to grow along our city sidewalks and buildings. They have no “Mother” tree to support them. From what I have read, they are planted too far apart, are planted with a tight root ball, their roots clipped at the very tip parts that reach out into the air pockets of the earth for nutrients. If planted as part of the sidewalk street scape, access to the soil is reduced by surrounding cement. Some have the trunk part protected by a higher steel encasement, which can be helpful, as those that do not have that are often scraped or broken during the winter by the sidewalk ploughs.

With every tree uprooted there is a release of carbon dioxide, more with the mature trees. It takes young trees a long time to store enough carbon dioxide to make up for that. Does this not have “environmental value” to the health and well being of us city folk? Does this not fall within the plan to reduce emissions?

I often hear, “Oh well, this is progress, I guess.” And yes, things will change

and have over the years long before I was around, however, with the removal of more trees, city streets are left burning under the hot sun. Offices and houses have no shade to assist with cooling. With floor to ceiling windows, air conditioners work at full blast, adding to the increase of emissions. This is surely the antithesis of progress.

I am encouraged when I see red netting around mature trees often where a private rebuild is happening and around trees on more public land when there has been a huge citizenry response. I am heartened to see the survival of some of the sidewalk trees and I cheer them on. I am hopeful when I hear the acknowledgement that new trees will be planted, and that the people in some of the neighbourhoods affected are keeping track and speaking up when those promises are not kept.

I look forward to seeing progress through an understanding of the importance of the heritage of trees and their significant role in our cities, as we continue to transform our landscapes.

*~ submitted by Susan Spence,
Environmental Action Group*





Global Climate Strike

What if you were trying to get everyone to deal with a very serious problem but you kept getting stymied by greedy, corrupt or indifferent institutions at every turn? Welcome to climate activism in Canada in 2024.

With this reality, the organizers of this year’s Global Climate Strike in Ottawa decided that it was time for a change in tactics and targets. Whereas a climate demonstration has usually seen us heading to Parliament Hill to make our views known, we’ve come to a strong realization that other players in Canada’s capital are also a huge part of the problem when it comes to trying to get useful action on stopping climate change.

There are many places we could have targeted but people can only demonstrate so much in one day.

We organizers felt that seven places look like places most urgently due for a visit:

1. City Hall - get moving on climate City of Ottawa!
2. Two financial institutions that greenwash while massively financing fossil fuels
3. Two fossil fuel lobby groups who play games to make themselves look like “ordinary hard-working Canadians”
4. A provincial government office doing things we don’t like; and,
5. A political party with virtually no policies for the biggest crisis to ever face humankind.

The strike is well on its way to being planned but there are many things you can do to help. We are looking for volunteers for many tasks, donations, and people to

work social media by liking and commenting on posts. Our web page and social media which includes Facebook, Instagram, Tik-Tok, X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn (yes, LinkedIn!), is on Linktree at <https://linktr.ee/ffottawa>

And of course, a great thing you can do is to come to the strike. You’ll be inspired by music and our speakers and learn about actions you can take. The demonstration starts at **Ottawa City Hall at 11:00 am. on Saturday, September 21st**. It will involve a march or roll down Slater Street and then back via Queen and Albert which will take about 90 minutes. Please join us as we work to expose the hypocrisy and complacency of powerful organizations and push for urgently needed change.

~ submitted by Mike Fletcher, Environmental Action Group





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