

**FIRST UNITARIAN
CONGREGATION OF OTTAWA**

The Parkway Spire



*Carl as Uni—see FirstU Ottawa
Pride 2025 p.7*

Inside this issue

From the Editor	1
Caring Contacts/In Memoriam	2
Meet the Minister!	3
Splinters from the Board	4
RE-flections - Jodi McIntosh	5-6
Musical Interludes	7
FirstU Ottawa Pride 2025	7
Campus Update—FirstU Ottawa Community Bonds	8
FirstU Ottawa’s Little Libraries	10
FirstU Information	11



**Deadline for next Spire submissions:
November 15, 2025**

From the Editor

by Anne Nagy

You may have seen in the eUU a request to answer a survey on the Spire. What do you find interesting (or not)? What would you like to see in a quarterly (or not) publication? What would you be willing to contribute (or not)? Is this kind of publication still appropriate to the needs of our congregation?

It has been difficult at times to obtain articles for each issue, aside from a few faithful contributors. Perhaps a specific, person-to-person nudge is needed to encourage folks. We could feature a particular photographer or poet in each issue. Perhaps we could revisit the personal interview/biography column if a volunteer would like to take this on (many thanks to previous contributors and interviewees as well). We have already invited committee leaders to let everyone know about progress being made (and many thanks for the response!)

The eUU is our place for announcements and reminders. The Spire is meant to be a more in-depth platform strengthening connections within the FirstU community.

Please take a moment to share your thoughts in a short, easy survey now posted on our website: (URL) or fill one out in the main office.



Mastheads from some old Spire issues.

Link for survey:

<https://www.firstunitarianottawa.ca/spire-survey.html>

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

September

Sooky Dunton	SookyDunton@bell.net	613-860-5571
Carmen Contreras	calesco@rogers.com	613-565-3613

October

Maryan O'Hagan	maryanohagan@rogers.com	613-729-7752
Marianne Wood	mharwood@gmail.com	613-725-3452

November

Barb Ryan	ryanbarb99@gmail.com	613-710-3131
Stan Pope	stanleypope74@yahoo.ca	613-614-3750

🌀 In Memoriam 🌀

Susan (Tudy) McLaine, née Reed. Tudy died 21 June 2025 (b.18 November 1933), predeceased by her spouse Alan. She leaves behind her daughters Lynn, Heather, Sheila and Margot; her grandchildren Ben, Rebecca, Megan, Devon, Katie and Nicholas; and her great-grandchild, Olive.

Elsa Lessard died 28 June 2025 (b.22 July 1922). Elsa was predeceased by her son John and grandson David, and six siblings; she is survived by daughter Janice, daughter-in-law Ginnie, three grandchildren, four great-grandchildren and two great-great grandchildren.

Elizabeth Alice Fleming Campbell (Betty) died on 30 July 2025 (b. 13 September 1925). Two nieces remained close and visited Betty often.

Also in our thoughts:

Jan Heynen died 28 June 2025 (b. January 6 1941), husband of Ria Heynen, father of Rob, Toumbi, Irene and Amie; brothers Piet (predeceased), Michel and Arnold, and sister Mia. He also leaves behind three grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.

Juliette Elaine (Julie) Stern died 12 July 2025 (b. March 26 1960); she was predeceased by father Seymour and mother Bette Stern, brothers Bob and Griff, and fiancé Rick Blak.

Meet the Minister!

- Rev. Lara Cowtan



Greetings dear First U Ottawa community!

I am delighted and excited to be joining you and beginning our journey of Ministry together. I hope you have had a good and nourishing summer break and are looking forward to what this new year brings. Doesn't September always feel like a new year? Whether you are beginning a new job, a new year of school, or sending your kids back to school which changes the rhythm of your days, are reorienting to city life after being away, or if you moved this summer, September is a time of change and new beginnings. It certainly is for me! As I settle into my new home and office space, and begin to explore this new city, I am alive with ideas and possibilities of what this move might bring. I am already in awe of the leadership and commitment of this congregation and so grateful for the opportunity to serve as your minister.

As we get to know each other and I learn the unique ways and story of First U, I will surely stumble, forget names, need directions or instructions more than once, and I hope you will be patient and understanding as we find our way forward together. I promise to be open and curious and hope to meet as many of you as possible to learn about who you are, what your hopes and dreams are, what you are struggling with, and how we can work together to meet this challenging moment in time with faith, resilience, hope and love.

In the coming months, we will have several opportunities to meet and share our stories. I also invite you to set a time to meet with me, just a get-to-know-you conversation, or if you have a topic in mind. This link will take you to a webpage to make an appointment. <https://calendly.com/laracowtan>

I will be in the office regularly on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, with Monday being my day of rest. Below is a time-worn and always helpful

reminder of when you should reach out for a chat.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Many blessings, Rev. Lara Cowtan

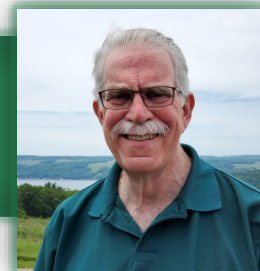
When to Call the Minister?

- When you haven't met me yet, but would like to.
- When you have problems to discuss—about anything.
- When a sympathetic ear might help.
- When you're going in the hospital or know someone else who is.
- When someone close to you dies or is critically ill.
- When you're planning to be married, or thinking of ending a marriage.
- When you return from vacation.
- When one of your children graduates from school.
- When you have a child to be dedicated.
- When you're pregnant but wish you weren't.
- When you've been arrested, or ought to be.
- When you want to learn more about Unitarian Universalism.
- When you're scared.
- When you'd like to make a bequest to the church.
- When you're considering joining the congregation.
- When a friend of yours wants to know more about our faith.
- When you have suggestions about the programs for the congregation.
- When you have suggestions for worship services.
- When you'd like to help with any congregational activities.
- When you want to discuss community issues.
- When you're mad at me.
- When you'd like to talk religion with me.

"When To Call the Minister" has been recreated and revised, attributed and mis-attributed, over the years, as things in newsletters often are. Universalist minister Peter Lee Scott wrote the original for the Elm City Universalist Church in New Haven, CT in 1957.

Splinters from the Board

- Chuck Shields



In the 1960's the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa (FirstU) outgrew its downtown building at Elgin and Lewis and moved to its current campus on the western edge of Westboro. At the time of the move the leadership had a vision of helping to address the needs of the very youngest and oldest in the community. The first step was to support the development of River Parkway Children's Centre, which began operations in basement rooms of the congregation's new building soon after it opened, and then moved to its own building on the campus in 2007.

The second step was to stimulate the construction on the campus of a residence for senior citizens that would embody Unitarian values and provide affordable senior housing. This part of the vision led to the opening in 1984 of Unitarian House of Ottawa (UHO) on land leased from FirstU. UHO is a non-profit facility dedicated to providing a caring, involving and stimulating environment for Ottawa's elderly.

Ever since then, Unitarian House has been an integral part of the FirstU campus family. Many members of the congregation and their relatives have lived their last years at Unitarian House. Members of the congregation have served on the board of Unitarian House and residents of UHO enjoy the gardens and walking around the campus. On innumerable occasions FirstU has hosted UHO activities and UHO has assisted FirstU with its needs.

In May, at a meeting with the FirstU Executive Committee and members of its board called by UHO to discuss their recently completed strategic plan, UHO leadership presented their request to own rather than lease their property and building. They said they believe this is crucial to securing their long-term financial future.

This request came as a surprise to the FirstU Board and has started a period of discussion. The board has identified a group which includes Mary Ella Keblusek, Terry Kimmel, Carmen Contreras, Bob Armstrong, Rev. Lara and myself to lead these discussions with UHO. This group has had one meeting with UHO leadership to explore why they see ownership as being essential to them.

Of course, this request has arisen at a time of considerable change for FirstU. We have just welcomed our new minister, Rev. Lara, who is getting her bearings, and we are progressing with our campus redevelopment plans which will see significant changes to the campus with the addition of two buildings of largely affordable housing.

The board will continue to explore this request with the leadership of UHO and with members of the congregation. **One step in this process will be a town hall in Worship Hall on Sunday, September 28, following the service.** The town hall will be hosted by the FirstU Board, with the involvement of leaders from UHO.

We anticipate that these discussions will take a while to consider potential options and the implications of the UHO request both for the future of FirstU and the sustainability of UHO. The board will keep the congregation informed as these discussions move along. Any decision that changes UHO's status on the FirstU campus will require congregational approval.

In the meantime, the FirstU Board is looking forward to FirstU and UHO continuing to work together as members of the campus family to celebrate and support each other.

RE-flections

- Jodi McIntosh



What I learned from the Shore

From the moment I stepped onto the shore, something shifted. The soft hush of the waves, the quiet strength in the driftwood, and the gentle give of the sand beneath my feet all seemed to speak to me. The noise and rush of everyday life faded, replaced by a deep, steady calm.



I began to breathe with the tides, slowly and deeply, feeling the peace settle into me. A strong feeling of joy that I hadn't felt in a long time started to rise, not suddenly, but like the ocean returning to the shore, patient

and sure. In that stillness, I began to see myself more clearly. I saw myself in the driftwood, resilient, beautifully worn, and quietly strong. Shaped by time and softened by the journey.



Walking these shores has given me hope, and with it, a grace I want to offer myself. That small shift has made a big difference. I want to be kinder to myself, more forgiving and more present. And because of that, I hope that I will speak more gently to my children, that I will show up more fully for my friends, and that I will carry a steadier heart into my work. My hope is that the lessons I've learned by the water will follow me far beyond the shore.





Musical Interludes

- Jenn Berntson, Music Director



We've had a great summer of music, with services including appearances by the House Band and the Summer Choir, a trombone performance by guest speaker Blue Petties on Pride Sunday, and Rhythm Church with Jodi McIntosh and me.

As the fall approaches, I am looking forward to a new season of music making! As usual, you can get involved with our choral programs by reaching out to Jenn at music@firstunitarianottawa.ca. Fusion will continue to meet on Mondays, but we are

primarily looking for singers in Chalice (Thursday evenings, no audition needed) and Three Rivers (Wednesday afternoons, with a fun and low-stress audition beforehand)! Rehearsals start after Labour Day weekend.

If you are an instrumentalist interested in playing a postlude during a service, please also reach out by email! You also might be interested in joining our House Band - for more information email houseband@firstunitarianottawa.ca

FirstU Ottawa Pride 2025

- photos by Nina Strang

Although the parade was ultimately cancelled, there was much fun had in the booth and before it started!



Campus Update—FirstU Ottawa Community Bonds

- Lisa Sharp and Brent Nicolle

A rare opportunity to invest in housing that matters

Over 12,000 households in Ottawa are on a waitlist for deeply affordable ("rent geared to income") housing. Families are waiting in shelters, seniors are choosing between rent and groceries, and working people are priced out of the very city they serve. First Unitarian Ottawa is inviting investors to be part of the solution — through Community Bonds which deliver good financial return as well as a meaningful social impact.

On a peaceful stretch of land near the Ottawa River, something transformative is underway. First Unitarian Ottawa, in partnership with Theia Partners and Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, will deliver 220 rental units in a community-oriented development where at least 80% of units are below market rent.

The project includes 2 buildings: OAHS will own/operate a 6-storey building, while First Unitarian Ottawa and Theia will co-own a 16-storey building named "Aspire Riverview Homes". First Unitarian Ottawa is committed to using a portion of its rental income to provide subsidized housing for lower-income families in this building.

What are Community Bonds?

Community bonds are a financing tool available to charities and not-for-profit organizations that allows individuals and organizations to invest in projects that have a positive social impact within their community, while also earning a financial return.

Why Invest in First Unitarian Ottawa Community Bonds?

This is where **capital meets conscience** — and makes a lasting difference.

- Your investment will directly support the creation of new environmentally sustainable rental homes for many individuals and families in Ottawa, located one block from a transit station.

Your investment increases our capacity to offer long-term rental subsidies to lower-income families, **even after your investment has been repaid.**

As a charity working to address the cycle of poverty, First Unitarian Ottawa believes the inherent worth and dignity of every person includes providing an affordable place to live. You can be part of the solution.

What investments are available?

We hope to launch our Community Bond campaign in December 2025 or January 2026 with the expectation that our CMHC funding will be approved early in the new year. We anticipate that there will be at least three Bond Series, for different terms and carrying different interest rates.

For more information, please attend one of our information sessions to be held on September 11 (on zoom), September 16 (in person) or September 21 (in person). Or contact:

invest@firstunitarianottawa.ca with your questions. We'd be happy to talk to you!

Get Ready for Fall Fair 2025!

- *Mary Ella Keblusek, Fall Fair Communications Coordinator*

Mark your calendars for **Saturday, November 15th**! Autumn is in the air and that means that the Fall Fair at FirstU is just around the corner! In November our congregational spaces will transform into the biggest church bazaar in Ottawa.

What's New with Fall Fair?

This year we'll be partnering with our campus neighbour, [River Parkway Children's Centre](#), to expand our traditional Fall Fair children's offering of toys and games, so that children's clothing will also be available at River Parkway's building. They will be open for sales at the same time as FirstU (9:30am-2pm), and will also be open for intake of donations the week before. We're still working out the details on this, but be sure to put aside any children's or teen clothing you no longer need, and watch the eUU for more information.

What can YOU do to help make the Fall Fair a success?

Gather and sort your surplus goods so you can bring them to the church starting Monday, November 10th through Thursday November 13th. Housewares, outdoor gear, books / music / movies, toys, clothing, linens, silent auction and flea market items, and more will be welcome at that time. Jewellery – even broken pieces – can be brought to the office on an ongoing basis. Check the FirstU website (under Make Friends) 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 in containers small and light enough and that one person can carry them.

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's a great [Promotions Page](#) on our website that allows you to download and print posters and flyers to distribute, along with providing ways to create Facebook postings to share for both donating to the Fair in advance and attending.

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! Check out our [Fall Fair Volunteer Page](#) for specific volunteer needs, or contact Eva at ffvols@firstunitarianottawa.ca. Questions? Please email fallfair@firstunitarianottawa.ca



New! FirstU Ottawa Little Libraries

- *Andrew Drake*

Read a book, take a book, share a book!

Little Free Libraries (LFLs) is a grassroots movement aimed at promoting literacy and community engagement through book sharing. The concept originated in 2009 when Todd Bol, a former teacher living in Hudson, Wisconsin, built a small wooden box resembling a house, filled it with books, and placed it in his front yard as a tribute to his late mother, an avid reader and teacher. This modest initiative sparked a broader idea: to create a network of free book exchanges accessible to everyone.

The growth of LFL's was fueled by social media, where users shared photos and stories of their local libraries, fostering a sense of belonging and community pride. The initiative has inspired similar projects globally, emphasizing the importance of reading and access to books in fostering educational and social growth. By 2013, Little Free Libraries had proliferated around the world, with thousands of libraries registered and mapped. Today, Little Free Libraries continues to thrive, with over 100,000 libraries in more than 100 countries, showcasing a global commitment to literacy and community engagement. Offshoots of the LFL movement include "little free pantries," where food, toys, diapers, dog treats, etc. are made available to those in need.

In the summer of 2025, FirstU installed two of its own LFL's – one for adults and one for children. These were built by a Gatineau craftsman, and made possible by a generous anonymous donation. The artwork that decorates the LFL's was provided by the creativity of participants in the Ajashki The Ajashki Indigenous Learning Centre at FirstU. The libraries are located under the awning near the "elevator door".

Ultimately, the plan is to register our LFL's so they will appear on the worldwide map.

On a recent afternoon, a mother and child were spotted reading a book from FirstU's new children's library. They were waiting to pick up the child's sibling from the River Parkway Children's Centre, and their curiosity was sparked when they spotted the bright colours of FirstU's LFL's from across the parking lot.

So please visit FirstU's Little Free Libraries when you get a chance. Have fun browsing! Take a book or leave a book. If you have several books to donate, you can leave them in a donation tub conveniently located under the children's Little Free Library.



First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

30 Cleary Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K2A 4A1

Phone: 613-725-1066, Fax: 613-725-3259

Email: uuoffice@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Website: www.firstunitarianottawa.ca

Facebook: www.facebook.com/First-Unitarian-Congregation-of-Ottawa

Office Hours: Monday to Friday, 9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

2025–2026 Board of Directors bod@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Chuck Shields, President president@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Mary Ella Keblusek, Vice President

Guy Belleperche, Treasurer

Amy Bérubé, Carmen Contreras, John Emond, Lisa Boulay: Members at Large

Program Staff

Rev. Lara Cowtan, Minister minister@firstunitarianottawa.ca 613-725-1066 x 225

Jodi McIntosh, Director of Religious Exploration dre@firstunitarianottawa.ca 613-725-1066 x 234

Jenn Bernston, Music Director music@firstunitarianottawa.ca 613-725-1066 x 230

Susie Shapiro, Religious Exploration Assistant, rea@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Lay Chaplains

Guy Belleperche, Lisa Boulay

Worship Associates

Lisa Boulay, Kris Cormier, Mary Jackson, Kate Kirkwood, Susan Mackenzie, Lee Rose

Administrative Staff

Jen Brennan, Operations Manager omr@firstunitarianottawa.ca 613-725-1066 x 221

Michelle Jackson, Finance Manager fm@firstunitarianottawa.ca 613-725-1066 x 222

Allison Armstrong, Communications Coordinator (e-UU, Order of Service and social media)

publications@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Building Staff

Julia Defalco, Audiovisual Coordinator av@firstunitarianottawa.ca 613-725-1066 x223

Dee Mollema, Lead Custodian leadcustodian@firstunitarianottawa.ca 613-725-1066 ext 224

Eden Bigras and Julia Defalco, Custodians 613-890-1067 (cellphone)

Spire Contributors

Jenn Bernston, Carmen Contreras, Rev. Lara Cowtan, Alexandra Devine, Andrew Drake, Mary Ella Keblusek, Jodi McIntosh, Brent Nicolle, Chuck Shields, Lisa Sharp and Nina Strang.

Next deadline for submissions: Nov 15, 2025 - please send submissions to spire@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Subscriptions: Electronic subscriptions are free, contact: publications@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Spire Editorial Team:

Editor: Anne Nagy Layout: Jan Andrews

Proofreading: Jen Brennan, Andrew Drake, Susan Mellor, Anne Nagy

***Our church is a liberal, spiritual congregation located
on the shores of the Ottawa River***