

First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

# The Parkway Spire

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Deadline for next Spire submissions:  
May 15, 2025



## The Power of Storytelling

*"Storytelling is a timeless human tradition, a thread woven into the fabric of every culture. It's more than just entertainment; it's a powerful tool for connection, education, and passing down what we value. For children, stories are especially important, a gateway to understanding the world and their place in it."*

**Read more of Jodi's engaging story on page 6!**

## 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 have to admit I'm feeling at a loss for words as I sit down to write this column. The news of the world is tumultuous, and news of my pending resignation is out and most of what I seem to be able to think about right now. Colleagues interested in applying to be your next minister have already begun reaching out to me to learn more about you. I trust you'll be as impressed by them as I am.

And so, for this issue of *The Parkway Spire*, I bring you something that made its way to my inbox a few days ago. This is from the newsletter of Carrie Newcomer, a Quaker poet and singer-songwriter from the U.S. Midwest. At least one of her songs has made its way to our Worship Hall in the last few years. I always appreciate what Carrie has to say, and in her latest post she mentions the good our fellow Unitarian Universalists are doing in her area. Read on ...

*Have you ever seen a bucket so absolutely full to the brim that a very small bit of water causes the bucket to overflow? Some folks might say that it was that last drop that overflowed the contents, but the truth is — it took every single drop to bring the water to the rim. It took every single drop for it to reach the point when all that good spirit spilled over. Each drop mattered. Each drop was filled with a spirit of love and hope that lifted the water level. You ... you my friend, and the daily drop you put into the bucket are deeply important, because you are the water that shifts the world, you are the river, creek or stream that fills the lake.*



*A story - because we need stories of how small things created large change - even when we cannot see the results of our actions today.*



**GREEN SANCTUARY**  
CONGREGATION

*Our local Unitarian Congregation has a committee called The Green Sanctuary. Several years ago, the committee started a campaign to explore how the community might become more sustainable, and how we might live more closely aligned with the community's values, and address climate disruption in a positive way. Climate change is a huge issue, and it is easy to feel overwhelmed or powerless to create change.*

*It was clear that asking everyone in the community to become vegan, like tomorrow, was not going to work. And so, The Green Sanctuary decided to not jump into one big solution, but rather break it down into small steps that individuals, families and the community could build upon. I remember the first week they asked if people could change out one regular light bulb for one energy efficient light bulb. They could get the energy saving light bulb at any grocery or hardware store. People with children or grandchildren were encouraged to talk about why they were exchanging the bulbs and maybe have them participate in the process. And the people of the community changed a single light bulb. The next week when asked, people said that they felt good about what they'd done and many of the kids were excited. Community weekly tasks continued - recycling plastic bottles, using reusable coffee and juice cups in the fellowship hall.*

... continued on page 3

# Facing Windows ... continued from page 2

~ Rev. Eric Meter

*Some people began eating one meal a week that was totally locally sourced. Others decided when it was time to replace an old washer or dryer to opt for the more energy efficient one. The people began to feel a sense of confidence, agency, empowerment and pride in doing daily things to help protect and preserve our beautiful, shared planet. Eventually, the community applied and received a sizable grant to put solar panels on the church. The community continues to encourage one another and takes great comfort and agency in knowing that they found a way forward that allowed them to contribute in real ways by taking small, creative steps forward. It didn't happen all at once. It happened one daily action at a time—*

*supported, encouraged and built upon by the community.*

My guess is that Carrie Newcomer is talking about our sibling congregation in Bloomington, Indiana. We have our own Green Sanctuary projects, and I like very much how they are different from what Newcomer writes about. Each community, like each person, is different, after all.

My best wishes to each and every one of you. The proverbial bucket of First Unitarian is full, indeed.

In shared faith,

~Rev. Eric



## In Memoriam

**Buchanan, Lois Alda** (née Ward) ~ died 17 December 2024 (b. 13 March 1928); wife of the late Malcolm (Mac), and mother of John, Ann and Robert. She and Mac were members at First Unitarian of Ottawa since 1959, and founding members of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa.

**McAndrew, William James** (Bill) ~ died 19 December 2024 (b. 22 January 1928), husband of Carolyn, and father of Robin and Ian (Jen).

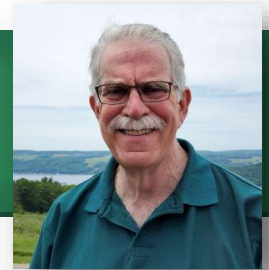
Also in our thoughts:

**Lisa and Eric**, on the death of Eric's father in January 2025.

**Nancy Cloutier** on the death of her father-in-law in mid-January.

# Splinters from the Board

~ Chuck Shields



Rev. Eric's decision that he needed to return to the US to be with his wife came as a sad surprise. After confirming that there was no other option that would allow him and Ann to stay, Mary Ella Keblusek, the board vice-president, and I began to investigate potential avenues forward to secure our next minister.

As I am writing this, the FirstU Board this evening voted to conduct a search for a new minister whom we would engage through a fairly new mechanism called 'contract-to-call'.

The 'contract-to-call' method to identify a congregation's minister has fast become a preferred approach for UU congregations to identify a new long-term minister. In fact, staff in the Unitarian Universalist Association Ministry Transitions Office (the group that facilitates American and Canadian UU congregations' selection of new ministers) have called it, 'the way of the future'. An indication of this is that in the current listing of ministerial opportunities, there are 13 that are following the traditional settled minister selection process and 26 that are seeking a full-time minister on a contractual basis.

Advantages of this new approach are that it is faster, cheaper and results in a congregation having several years to be with a minister before deciding whether to call that person to be their settled minister. UUA staff have said that the pool of

candidates is the same for all types of ministry, so seeking a contract minister wouldn't limit us to a sub-group of available ministers.

In the 'contract-to-call' approach to minister selection our Search Committee would identify and propose to the board a candidate who would be offered a three-year contract with the understanding that there is an option to call the individual as the next settled minister. The initial search is quick and would extend from February to May. The minister would be engaged and would begin work in August.

Around the end of the second year of the minister's service we would form a committee which would conduct a process with the whole congregation to decide if congregants want to call the contract minister to stay as the new settled minister.

Contract ministry ensures at least a three-year period with the contract minister, and the possibility that the minister will stay with the congregation for many years. It provides the congregation and the minister the opportunity to get to know each other over two years before deciding to commit to a longer-term relationship. It also makes Canadian congregations more attractive because the effort of moving across the border is less daunting when the position can be extended for many years.

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# Splinters from the Board ... *continued from page 5*

~ *Chuck Shields*

The board has identified a Search Committee that will conduct the search – Guy Belleperche, Carmen Contreras, Mary Ella Keblusek, Sharmila Khare and Lee Rose. This group will guide the development of a Congregational Record which provides a broad range of information about FirstU to potential candidates. As part of that they will consult with members of the congregation. They will review information provided by candidate ministers, based on which they will identify a short-list of candidates, will interview them, view sample Sunday services, gather references and prepare a recommendation for the board.

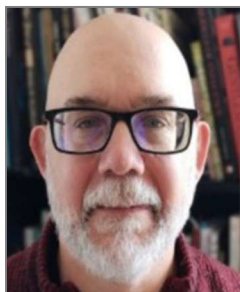
The board has agreed, that if the committee doesn't find a candidate they think is satisfactory, that

rather than select a minister that didn't seem right, that we would be lay-led for a year and then engage in the search process when it begins again at the end of this year.

I, the board and the Search Committee are optimistic that FirstU will be seen as an attractive congregation and will appeal to a number of solid candidates. In fact, as I write this in the third week of February, Rev. Eric has already been contacted by two colleagues who were interested in learning more about the opportunity we offer.

~ *submitted by Chuck Shields*

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Guy Belleperche



Carmen Contreras



Mary Ella Keblusek



Sharmila Khare



Lee Rose

# RE-flections: Our Whole Lives

~ Jodi McIntosh



## The Power of Storytelling

Storytelling is a timeless human tradition, a thread woven into the fabric of every culture. It's more than just entertainment; it's a powerful tool for connection, education, and passing down what we value. For children, stories are especially important, a gateway to understanding the world and their place in it.

Stories spark kids' imaginations, fueling creativity and critical thinking. They offer a safe space to explore big feelings and navigate tricky situations. Through stories, kids learn empathy, build resilience, and see the world from different angles. Stories introduce kids to different cultures, historical periods, and moral dilemmas, laying the groundwork for a well-rounded understanding of the world.

But the magic of storytelling isn't confined to childhood. It's something we need as adults too. It connects us to our past, our families, and reminds us we're all in this together. Stories shared within families create a strong sense of belonging and intergenerational connection. They become treasured memories, passed down through generations, weaving families together. These stories can be anything – funny family moments, tales from way back when, fables, or even just a beloved children's book. The important thing is sharing them.

For the last year and a half, I've been choosing and telling stories for our services each week, and wow, have I learned a lot! I've seen how stories can touch both kids and adults. The stories I choose can help illuminate the sermon's message in a relatable way, bridging the gap between abstract concepts and lived experience. I've also realized how powerful stories can be for making emotional connections. A

well-chosen story can touch hearts, evoke laughter, and inspire reflection, creating a shared experience that strengthens our community.

My childhood was filled with the captivating stories my father used to tell. We never tired of hearing them, even the ones we knew by heart. He'd recount his childhood adventures growing up in Vancouver, the time he spent with his grandparents, his experiences working up north in the Arctic, and my personal favorite: the tales of his time on a research ship. Those stories were more than just entertainment; they were a connection to him, a way of feeling close and loved. They instilled in me a deep appreciation for the power of narrative. I am now passing on this tradition to my kids, sharing both the stories of my father and my own stories. I may also tell the same one more than once, but they don't seem to mind.

My weekly storytelling has taught me to select resonant stories that engage both children and adults. The ideal story engages children with its captivating narrative and accessible language, while simultaneously offering layers of meaning that adults can appreciate. It's a delicate balance, but when it works, it's truly special. Some of my favorites so far have been the "Jetpig" stories, which were all about the UU values.



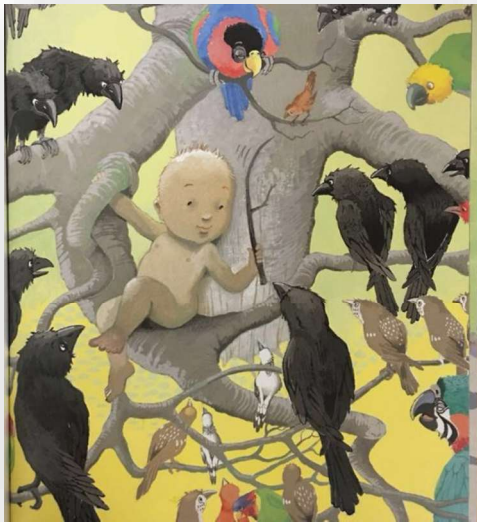
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# RE-flections: Our Whole Lives ... *continued from page 6*

~ *Jodi McIntosh*

I loved how the series used the garden prop as a connecting thread – each week we planted a new value, and by the end, we had a whole garden of value-flowers! This series was so meaningful because it used an engaging narrative and creative props that made abstract concepts concrete and relatable.

I also loved sharing "Big Momma Makes the World" and weaving in Jane Perry's music. It was so great to hear people singing along, and I had so many folks tell me afterwards how touched they were to hear Jane's music again in the service. "Big Momma" was special because combining it with Jane's music created a powerful, multi-sensory experience that resonated deeply with the congregation, fostering a sense of shared joy and connection.



And finally, the story I got to share for just the adults: *Tear Soup*. This story was Rev. Eric's choice, and it was such a moving story to share – it was hard to keep my voice steady enough to finish. There were several tear-stained cheeks in the pews that day. This story demonstrated the power of stories to stir emotion and make connections with others, reminding us that grief is a shared human experience and that we are not alone in our pain. It offered comfort and validation, highlighting the cathartic power of storytelling.



Storytelling is an amazing gift we can give to our kids, our families, and ourselves. It helps us connect, share what matters most, and make memories that last a lifetime. It helps us understand ourselves, the world around us, and the incredible power of being human. So, gather your family, grab a book, or just tell a story from your heart. You'll be surprised at how much closer it brings you.

~*Jodi McIntosh, Director of Religious Exploration*

# Musical Interludes

~ Jenn Berntson



We've had a lovely fall of music-making! We've welcomed new members to Chalice and Three Rivers, and December featured our concert *Songs for a Long Night*, a program of music of warmth, hope, and light. We also had a special music service in November featuring reflections from various members of the congregation on the hymns that hold special meaning for them.

This term, we are preparing for a special event on March 8 and 9, in collaboration with Tone Cluster, Ottawa's largest queer choir. All three of FirstU's choirs along with Tone Cluster will participate in a workshop with Kimberley Waigwa (Waigwa, they/them), a former UU music director and Artistic Director of Minnesota's One Voice Chorus! FirstU will host both the workshop on March 8, and then a special music-focused service on Sunday, March 9 on the subject of protest music. All three of our choirs will sing together in a special mass choir

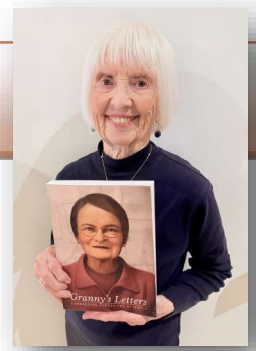
performance, and special guest Waigwa will offer the reflection, speaking about the music the choirs have prepared and protest music in general. There will be chances to sing and learn protest music from within our hymnal and outside of it. It will be a wonderful service - don't miss it! That afternoon, FirstU will also host a concert "Rise" by Tone Cluster and Waigwa - tickets are by donation and can be purchased here: <https://www.zeffy.com/en-CA/ticketing/rise-a-community-singing-event>

If you're interested in joining any of our choirs OR in providing special music for a Sunday service - singing or other instruments - please reach out to me - [music@firstunitarianottawa.ca](mailto:music@firstunitarianottawa.ca). You can feel free to suggest a particular piece you would like to do, and I will look for an opportunity to program it!

~Jenn Berntson



# Meet a Member: Joan Turner



With her sister Iona, Joan has been preoccupied for the last three years producing a book, *Granny's Letters: Connecting Across the Atlantic*. This is a compilation of a remarkable seventeen years of letters her grandmother wrote to family.

Joan is quite involved with all her large family. She grew up in Saskatchewan, the eldest of seven children and Joan was in her late teens when the youngest children were born. Her parents were very involved in the Anglican Church. Her mother did a lot of public speaking and fundraising. One year her mother ran in the federal election. Joan had been worried that she would have to leave university to care for her siblings, but was relieved when her mother lost.

Joan went to the University of Saskatchewan (BA in Psychology) and then to UBC (BSW in Social Work). She went back to Saskatchewan and worked in Child and Family Services in Regina and Saskatoon. She later completed a Master of Social Work at the University of Manitoba. Two daughters, Joy and Cathy, were born to her and her first husband Ches Zeglinski. In Winnipeg, Joan had a very interesting

life in social work and as a parent of active children. After almost 20 years as an associate professor at the University of Manitoba, Joan left the University and set up a private practice in counselling, and did many workshops.

Joan has published several books. The first one was *Perspectives on Women in the 1980's*, based on a conference where Gloria Steinem was the keynote speaker. The book was later used in Women's Studies. About this time, Joan became an active feminist. In 1990, Joan edited *Living the Changes*, also published by University of Manitoba Press. She also co-edited *Spider Women*, an anthology of women's writing, art and music.

Joan learned about the Unitarian Universalist congregation in Winnipeg from a neighbour who told her about a Sunday service panel presentation on Indigenous people. Joan immediately realized at coffee after the service that the Unitarian congregation was where she wanted to be. Her husband and children also attended services.

Joan and Ches divorced in 1980, and about seven years later Joe Connor came into Joan's life. Joe worked for the University of

Manitoba as head of the media department.

About this time Joan's students wanted her to attend their graduation dinner and dance. Joan phoned Joe, although she didn't know him very well, and asked him to go with her. That was the beginning of their relationship. They married in 1990.

In 2003, Joan and Joe moved to Ottawa to help with the care of their grandchildren. Joan's daughter Joy was in her final year of Psychiatry. The children's caregiver was often sick so Joan or Joe would fly to Ottawa to help. They were glad to be able to support the family because their eldest grandchild Amy fell playing soccer and was diagnosed with osteosarcoma. Family were told that Amy would need a year of treatment at CHEO. (Amy recovered and is now in her last year of Medicine here in Ottawa).

Joe and Joan have been actively invested in the Unitarian congregation. Joan facilitated Mapmaking for Newcomers and Our Whole Lives. She has been an active member of Unitarian GoGos for the last 18 years. Both Joe and Joan delight in singing in the congregation's choirs.

# Bank Divestment at FirstU Environmental Action Group (EAG)

FirstU has taken actions to vote with its money and divest from fossil fuels. Starting in 2014 the congregation agreed to curtail investments in fossil fuels by removing the top 200 coal and top 200 oil and gas companies from the church legacy fund. We believe that FirstU was the second faith community in Canada to divest its savings from fossil fuels. After we did this, some of the members of FirstU's Environmental Action Group (EAG) noted that we were still investing and involved with Canadian banks which are heavily invested in fossil fuels.

More recently, FirstU agreed to have 15% of church legacy funds invest in renewable energy. We believe that neither the 2014 divestment from fossil fuels nor the recent investment in renewable energy have had negative impacts on congregational finances. The EAG would now like now propose that we take a next step and move our

banking away from the fossil fuel bank we use currently to a climate-friending institution.

Here's a little background. Canada's top five banks are among the 20 top banks for fossil fuel investment in the world despite Canada's economy only representing roughly 2% of the world's economy as measured by gross domestic product. Since the election of Donald Trump, four Canadian banks have left the net zero banking alliance, a group working to direct capital investment away from fossil fuels. This includes FirstU's bank, BMO.

By moving our banking to a climate-friending institution, FirstU will become mostly divested from fossil fuels and money deposited at our congregational bank account would not be lent out to fossil fuel interests to expand their enterprises. According to the Global Fossil Fuels Divestment Database, there are currently 1667 divesting institutions

with a collective value of \$40.76 trillion. FirstU would be joining many faith communities, including Unitarian ones such as Vancouver Unitarians.

The EAG has considered alternatives to BMO. The Meridian Credit Union appears to have the strongest climate mandate of any banking institution in Ottawa. In addition to its climate mandate, Meridian's status as a credit union is important. Credit unions are philosophically more aligned with Unitarian values in terms of how they are governed and their policies with respect to diversity, equity and inclusion and responsible investing generally.

The EAG will formally propose this switch in financial institutions at the Annual General Meeting this spring. Until then, feel free to talk to an EAG member about this proposal or about your own banking, investments or pension fund.

*~Mike Fletcher  
Environmental Action Group Chair*





# First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

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