

FirstU Ottawa Edith Holtom Peace Lectures

Background Information

Edith Holtom

As well as being an active member of First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa (FirstU) for the last fifty years of her life, Edith Holtom was a prominent leader in local, national and international peace organizations. She worked diligently for disarmament and peace – work that became very politically unwelcome during the McCarthy era of the 1950s. In honour of her unflagging peace activism, her family created the Edith Holtom Memorial Lecture Fund to host lectures promoting conflict resolution and peace by FirstU. [Rev. John H. Morgan](#) (A Unitarian Minister with international recognition for his work on Peace) delivered the first lecture in 1984 and has been followed by many prominent Canadians including Ed Broadbent, Peggy Mason and Irvin Waller.

Peace, Health and Climate Action

It is the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. There is just one decade left for world leaders to realize their commitments to achieve the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) by 2030. Will leaders take the decisive actions now on the transformations to maintain peace by reducing poverty, advancing health and education, and continuing prosperity, while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests?

Peace was the main reason for establishing the United Nations following the Second World War. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights set out a blue print for peace and to avoid the atrocities of the world wars. Today, much progress has been made in reducing loss of life and brutality in wars. So much so that many more persons die in homicides than in wars and terrorism, but climate change creates famine, floods and disease.

It is the year of COVID where the World Health Organization has been central to combating the pandemic. But the existence of WHO is threatened by the withdrawal of funding by its biggest contributor the US and also its main health partner the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. WHO sets myriad standards for health and medical science and more. It has called attention to the importance of vaccinations that have been ignored because of the COVID crisis.

Just one year ago, Greta Thunberg told the truth of mass extinction to world leaders at the U.N. Climate Action Summit. Action to avert the climate catastrophe is essential if human kind will not go extinct in the next decades. It is also essential to averting the wars in Syria, South Sudan and more as well as the mass migration from Africa and elsewhere to Europe.

The UN Sustainable Goals (SDG) put the principles from the Universal Declaration into targets for action that are measurable for both rich countries like Canada and poorer countries. They establish a timetable to get results before 2030. The first SDG focuses on actions to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. The fifth SDG advances ways to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, including significant reduction in violence against women. SDGs 12-15 set out urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts and work to preserve our oceans and forest. SDG16 promotes just, peaceful and inclusive societies, including significant reductions in homicides and violence against children.

UU's and the UN

UU's have been significant players in the development of the UN. In 1946, John Humphrey – a Unitarian from Winnipeg - was appointed director of human rights for the United Nations Secretariat and is recognized as the author of the first draft of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights. He worked tirelessly with others from across the world until it was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948.

The Unitarian Universalist Office (UNO) at the United Nations has a long history of providing strong leadership in all aspects of human rights at a policy level at the UN. UNO was created in 1962 at the recommendation of the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Adlai Stevenson – another Unitarian. The UU UN Office led the faith caucus to support the creation of the International Criminal Court. It organized to overcome UN apathy about sexual orientation & gender identity issues. In 2020 their theme is All In for Climate Justice: People, Power, Planet.

The FirstU Congregation of Ottawa continues as a UU-UNO [Blue Ribbon Congregation](#) for its work on international peace, liberty and justice. It will be dedicating its worship service on October 25 to the United Nations and the UNO. Our last Holtom Lecture was delivered by our new board member Irvin Waller, who received international recognition for his role in getting the UN General Assembly in 1985 to resolve to prevent crime and adopt the Declaration on Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power. Currently our congregation focus is on how to avert the extinction of human kind entitled *Confronting Climate Catastrophe: Transforming Fear to Empowerment*. Our members participate in many ways in demonstrations and other actions to raise awareness and mobilize government around the declared climate emergency.

