

First Unitarian
Congregation
of Ottawa



GETTING CONNECTED



January
2026

First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

This document will help you connect with the groups and activities in our Congregation. You can always access the latest version on the FirstU website, <https://www.firstunitarianottawa.ca/get-connected.html>

Because meeting locations and times can change and some groups have restrictions on attendance, always make contact before you attend a meeting for the first time unless the description specifically suggests you can drop in anytime.



This document is prepared and maintained by volunteers like you. To give updates and corrections, please contact:

gettingconnected@firstunitarianottawa.ca

An Activity for Everyone

Why might you consider volunteering or getting involved in groups or activities within our Congregation? Your motivations are as unique and personal as your spiritual beliefs and practices. But, one of the great strengths of our religion is that the diversity of member motivations is matched by the opportunities available for members to find what is valuable for them.

Your very personal needs or desires might lead you to look for groups or activities that foster:

- a sense of belonging,
- opportunities for spiritual growth,
- positive action to better our communities, country, and the world,
- personal sharing and close relationships with others,
- active sharing through music, work parties, or organization of events,
- intellectual growth through study, reading, discussion, meditation, or lectures,
- the development of new friendships, and/or
- chances to make a significant difference in the world we all share.

If any of these hit a chord, please look through the varied opportunities described in this document. You may be surprised at the depth and breadth of what goes on in our Congregation outside of Sunday worship. Don't hesitate to make contact and find out more – there's never any obligation and you may find a perfect match for your personal journey.

In this document and in conversation, we use many abbreviations which can confuse someone new. For reference, here are some we use often:

FirstU – First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

UU – Unitarian Universalist

eUU – FirstU weekly newsletter

UUFO – Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa

UH – Unitarian House

RPCC – River Parkway Children's Centre

CUC – Canadian Unitarian Council

OrH – Or Hanesamah

OWL – Our Whole Lives

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Congregation Staff**Minister:**

Rev Lara Cowtan x225
minister@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Community Minister:

Rev Linda Goonewardene
riverspirit888@gmail.com

Operations Manager:

Jen Brennan x221
omr@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Finance & HR Manager:

Michelle Jackson x222
fm@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Lead Custodian:

Dee Mollema x224 leadcustodian@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Custodians:

Eden Bigras, Julia Defalco, Leaf Holmes
custodian cell: 613-890-1066

Music Director:

Jenn Berntson x230
music@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Director of Religious Exploration (RE):

Jodi McIntosh x234
dre@firstunitarianottawa.ca

RE Assistant

Susie Shapiro
rea@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Sound and Lighting Co-ordinator:

Julia Defalco x223
av@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Contacts: Church Office

uuoffice@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Adult Learning & Growth

The Adult Learning and Growth Team coordinates ongoing groups which foster connection and community building. The team also plans and coordinates events and workshops which foster personal and spiritual growth and increase understanding of Unitarian Universalism.

Contacts: Eva Berringer & Jane Lindsay
adultlearning@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Adult Library

The self-serve lending library in the Lounge contains roughly 900 books and other items on diverse subjects. In our basement archives there is also a small collection of older and rare books (some printed in the nineteenth century).

Contacts: Jan Davis
jandeeiphone@gmail.com

Ajashki Food Security Project

Ajashki is a Food Security and Climate Change Learning Centre.

Contacts: Michelle Jackson
fm@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Archives

Our Archives serve three purposes: 1. to help us locate our internal information more easily, 2. to have readily at hand documentation we are legally required to keep and to produce upon request, and 3. to preserve the main outlines of our history for future generations.

Contacts: tbd
uuoffice@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Board of Directors

The Board (BoD) is elected annually by the Congregation to provide leadership in all aspects of the church community.

The annual slate for the Board members is proposed by the Nominating Committee. Any Congregation member may attend a Board meeting except for the portions of meetings that may be in-camera.

Contacts: Chuck Shields
president@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Book of Gratitude

The Book of Gratitude lists people who have made exceptional financial donations to First Unitarian Ottawa. It is displayed in a case in the office where members may peruse it.

Contacts: Bob Armstrong
bob@thearmstrongs.ca

BookShelf

The bookshelf sells a selection of fiction, non fiction and children's books in Fellowship Hall after Sunday services.

Contacts: Jan Davis
jandeeiphone@gmail.com

Bridge Group

All levels of players are welcome to this mentally stimulating fellowship activity. The format is multi-table rotational, Chicago scoring. We meet from 7:00-9:00 pm the first Friday of the month on Zoom and the third Sunday afternoon in person, from September to May. Contact us or see the e-UU newsletter for dates, location, and cost.

Contacts: Brent Nicolle & Barb Ryan
bridgehost@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Campus Community Wellbeing Committee (CCWC)

Here is your link to the CCWC's first annual report, which summarizes the committee's activities since its inception in 2023:

https://mcusercontent.com/33024cd504d94c8cc2ee991dc/files/f7f87d56-2859-c933-a2df-9ea473854ee3/CCWC_annual_report_to_December_2024_Final.docx \t " _blank"

Representatives of the Cleary campus partners (currently, First Unitarian, Unitarian House, River Parkway Children's Centre, Or Haneshamah, and Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services) worked together to communicate and address matters of common concern and interest. In the foreseeable future, as campus plans progress through the site planning stages to construction and beyond, the CCWC will continue to identify and communicate issues impacting the well-being of campus visitors and residents.

Contacts: Jen Brennan

omr@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Campus Planning Committee

The Committee assists the Board and the Congregation by studying, providing advice on and making recommendations for policies and plans related to campus planning. The committee includes non-voting representatives from our campus partners, RPCC, Or Haneshamah, and Unitarian House. The Board appoints the members representing the Congregation.

Contacts: Terry Kimmel

campusplanning@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Caring Network*

We encourage and nurture a caring network in the Congregation. Our volunteers provide occasional transportation, phone or make personal visits to people who are ill or house-bound, assist in emergencies, send caring cards, and help to organize memorial receptions for Members.

Contacts: Carmen Contreras

caringvisitors@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Choir (Chalice)

Chalice Choir is a non-auditioned choir and everyone is welcome. Previous musical experience is helpful but not necessary.

Contacts: Jenn Berntson

music@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Choir (Fusion)

Fusion is designed for experienced singers. Ability to sight-read and/or learn music quickly is an asset.

Contacts: Jenn Berntson

music@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Choir (Three Rivers Singers)

Three Rivers Singers is a small women's ensemble that sings in a variety of styles, aiming to highlight female composers and themes of welcome, community, and empowerment.

Contacts: Jenn Berntson

music@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Communications & Outreach Committee

This Committee assists the Board in ensuring effective communications both within and external to the Congregation. The Committee works closely with various groups in the Congregation to develop communications strategies.

Committee members are appointed by the Board.

Contacts: Carl Sonnen

communications@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Embracing Diversity Committee

We plan and oversee the implementation of educational, advocacy, outreach, and community-building activities to create awareness of current realities and to build attitudes, behaviours, and practices that embrace and respect diversity of all kinds.

Contacts: Kris Cormier

diversity@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Environmental Action Working Group

The EAWG promotes awareness of environmental issues and encourages individual actions.

Contacts: Mike Fletcher & Donna Bowen-Willer

EAWG@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Euchre Monthly Group

Contacts: Lisa Sharp

lisasharp@rogers.com

Fair Trade Chocolate Sub Group

On Sundays and on request, we sell La Siembra Coffee/Chocolate and ZATOUN products in support of small farmer co-ops in developing countries.

Contacts: Gary Campbell

gary@web.ca

Fall Fair

Fall Fair, our annual bazaar, in November, is FirstU's largest fundraiser. It is a satisfying experience for some 350 volunteers.

Contacts: Catherine Pope

fallfair@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Finance Committee

Monitors, reviews, and proposes policies related to finance matters. This excludes day to day financial matters for which the contact is the Finance Manager, Michelle Jackson (fm@firstunitarianottawa.ca).

The Finance Committee members are chosen by the Board-appointed chair.

Contacts: Guy Belleperche

treasurer@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Governance Committee

Monitors, reviews, and proposes policies related to governance matters. The Committee members are chosen by the Board-appointed chair.

Contacts: Guy Belleperche

governance@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Hospitality Hour (Sunday)

Volunteers are recruited for Hospitality Hour (a sign up schedule is posted in Fellowship Hall) and training is provided. On Sundays, volunteers prepare the tables and beverages and snacks in Fellowship Hall before services and serve refreshments following. Clean up includes washing of dishes.

Contacts: Tarrel Armstrong
tarrel@theArmstrongs.ca

Journey Groups

Journey Groups offer the opportunity for reflection, sharing and deep listening on specific themes. They are a wonderful way to get to know fellow congregants at a deeper level.

Contacts: tbd
adultlearning@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Justice & Equality Action Group

We encourage our Congregation to deliberate on issues of social justice, advocate for social change, and join with other people of faith and goodwill. Individuals are encouraged to bring their social justice concerns to the group for discussion and action.

Contacts: Lisa Sharp
SJAN@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Knitters Group

This group welcomes knitters and crocheters of any level, from beginner to expert, who enjoy creating hand-made items in a friendly, supportive setting. Using donated yarn we make a variety of goods to sell at Fall Fair, Mitten Tree, etc. or to donate to special community projects.

Contacts: Denise Choquet
dchoquet613@gmail.com

Lay Chaplaincy Team

The Ottawa Lay Chaplaincy Committee (aka FirstU Lay Chaplaincy Team) serves both our congregation and the UU Fellowship of Ottawa. Active members of FirstU or the UUFO may apply to be lay chaplains.

Contacts: Sharmila Khare
chaplaincy@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Mapmaking

Mapmaking will involve you in a range of activities to:

- make connections with others;
- reflect together on your concepts of spirituality, faith and our UU principles;
- learn more about FirstU and its linkages to the broader world;
- consider what it means to belong to the FirstU community of faith and what you can bring to it; and
- reflect on your 'credo' of who you are and where you are in your faith journey.

Contacts: Eva Berringer
adultlearning@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Meditation Garden Friends

This team cares for the meditation garden. Volunteers are cherished - our tasks vary from deadheading and weeding to plant research.

Contacts: Susan Mellor & Margaret Linton
susanmellor@rogers.com

Memorial Receptions

The Memorial Receptions Team will occasionally provide a reception after a Memorial Service for a member of our congregation. Volunteers help in setting up, serving, and cleaning up Fellowship Hall.

Contacts: Evelyn Algar
evelyn.algar@rogers.com

Men's Breakfast Group

The Men's Breakfast Group is a social group open to any man, whether a member of FirstU or not. We meet for breakfast prepared by participants on the second and fourth Friday morning of each month during most of the year. The breakfast program usually consists of a speaker and the group also provides assistance for FirstU or Unitarian House events on request.

Contacts: Chris Hughes
chris@thehughes.com

Mental Health Support & Action Group

The MHSAG provides a listening presence and mutual support for each other. We engage in actions to address mental health challenges in the Congregation and in the broader society. Challenges include mental illness, addiction, dementia, and disaster anxiety, e.g., climate change, war, pandemics. We support Ancoura, a charity dedicated to providing stable, affordable housing within supportive communities for persons living with a mental illness.

Contacts: johnnie gall & Rev Linda Goonewardene
mhsag@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Mindfulness Meditation Group

We meet weekly on Zoom. All interested in 'turning inward with patience' in a supportive and mostly silent community, are welcome to join in. Wednesdays - 7:00pm on Zoom.

Meeting ID: 880 7343 6250 Passcode: 259109

Contacts: Colleen Glass
meditation@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Music Venue Volunteers

Help with music events at FirstU, circa 12 per year.

Contacts: Terry Kimmel
terrykimmel@sympatico.ca

Newcomers - Introducing Ourselves

This course is offered from time to time and is advertised in the eUU newsletter when it is scheduled.

Contacts: Eva Berringer
adultlearning@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Nominating Committee*

The committee finds and nominates congregation members for Board positions and assists in recruiting members for major committees. Committee members are elected at the Fall Congregational Meeting for 2-year terms.

Contacts: Mike Fletcher
nominating@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Office Assistants

Volunteers who are familiar with the range and depth of our congregational life staff the main office during week-day office hours and on Sunday mornings. We need more people to be trained in the duties even if they can help out only occasionally.

Contacts: Jen Brennan
omr@firstunitarianottawa.ca

OWL - Our Whole Lives

OWL is a positive, comprehensive, and age-appropriate educational program that promotes sexual health and provides accurate, developmentally appropriate information in the context of our Unitarian Universalist community. Programs for elementary aged children, youth, and adults are administered and coordinated through the Director of Religious Exploration and related groups.

Contacts: Lisa Sharp
owl@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Personnel Committee*

This committee assists the Board by helping to provide watchful and careful monitoring of personnel policies and general practices. It reviews/proposes policies and facilitates communication related to personnel policies and practices. Committee members are appointed by the Board.

Contacts: Chuck Shields
hr@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Poetry Sharing Group

This group meets every two months on Zoom to share poetry that we love. Members are welcome to share a poem they have written, but you don't have to write in order to join us.

Contacts: Clea Derwent
clderwent@gmail.com

Property Team*

We oversee the operation of the Major Maintenance Fund, which involves expenditures over \$1,000 as part of our mandate to keep our building and campus functional, safe, and beautiful.

Contacts: Jen Brennan
propertyteam@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Reading for Growth (Friday)

This group meets monthly on Zoom. The books cover a wide range of topics such as politics, social issues, spiritual and religious thought and current events.

Contacts: Clea Derwent
clderwent@gmail.com

Reading for Growth (Non-fiction)

This is a nonfiction book club meeting monthly on Zoom. We read on a wide range of subjects choosing books that are readily available in the public library.

Contacts: Katharine Elliott
monrg@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Refugee Sponsorship Action Group

We handle refugee sponsorship applications and also coordinate post-arrival support to ensure that our refugees are successful in building their new lives in Canada.

Contacts: Eva Berringer & Brent Nicolle
refugees@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Religious Exploration Children & Youth

Our religious exploration program caters to children aged 2-18. We offer year-round Sunday morning programming for children aged 2-12, providing creative and age-appropriate activities to explore their beliefs through stories, crafts and play. Additionally, our monthly youth group for ages 12-18 meets on Friday evenings. During these gatherings, the youth come together in community to share a meal and connect with others who share similar values.

Contacts: Jodi McIntosh
dre@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Right Relations Team

Members of the FirstU Right Relations Team (RRT) provide education in healthy relations and conflict management.

Members of the RRT who have relevant training and experience may act as facilitators and coaches to assist congregants in resolving their issues in the spirit of the Relational Covenant.

Contacts: Lena Jones & Marilen Gerber
rightrelations@firstunitarianottawa.ca

River Parkway Children's Centre Liaison

RPCC currently serves 54 children and is located on the FirstU campus. See riverparkwaychildrenscentre.ca for more information.

Contacts: Alexandra Devine
director@rpcc-rhcc.com

Social Justice Action Network

The SJAN team co-ordinates the activities of the social responsibility groups.

Contacts: Justine De Jaegher
SJAN@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Sound & Light Team

The S+L Team operates audio-visual equipment for all Worship Hall events. New operators are given technical training and shadow the Sound and Lighting Coordinator.

Contacts: Julia Defalco
av@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Spirituality & Philosophy Discussion Group

Usually, this group meets the 1st and 3rd Saturday of each month. Check the e-UU weekly newsletter for current information.

Contacts: Paula Theetge
paulath@rogers.com

Tai Chi Practice and Learning

Tai Chi is a series of gentle movements that improves circulation, strengthens the bones, and develops good balance. We welcome anyone to participate, beginners included. No advance registration needed - just drop in. Some familiarity with Tai Chi is recommended.

Contacts: Friends of Tai Chi
adultlearning@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Trivia Quiz Night

One Monday evening monthly on Zoom. Diverse questions. Play alone or with a team.

Contacts: Andrew Drake
trivia@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Unitarian GoGos

We support the Stephen Lewis Foundation to Turn the Tide of HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Contacts: Sheila Green
unitariangogos@gmail.com

Unitarian House Liaison

Unitarian House is the seniors' residence on our campus. One person from the Congregation serves on the Unitarian House Board of Governors.

Contacts: Mary Ella Keblusek
maryellakeblusek@gmail.com

UU Connections Team

We make members of the Congregation more aware of Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC) and international Unitarian Universalist (UU) activities and issues by encouraging participation in webinars and other training, committees/task forces, and regional, national, and international conferences and meetings, and by recruiting delegates to represent FirstU at CUC meetings.

Contacts: Guy Belleperche
uuconnections@firstunitarianottawa.ca

UU Pride Group

Social & support group for 2SLGBTQ+ UUs. We meet once a month for structured discussions, fun activities, games, & socializing.

Contacts: Kris Cormier
diversity@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Virtual Discussion Circle

Meets weekly on Zoom to discuss a topic. Thursdays 1:30-3:00 Go to the weekly e-UU newsletter to get the Zoom link.

Contacts: Andrew Drake
andrewdrake235@gmail.com

Voyageurs Group*

A group for men focused on developing their full emotional and spiritual potential. We have bi-weekly three hour meetings and semi-annual weekend retreats. The group is small and new members are welcomed as current members move on.

Contacts: Tom Rankin
loghouse49@gmail.com

W&M1 Welcome & Membership Team

There are four W&M groups: Greeters, Membership, Newcomer Outreach & Engagement, and Welcome Table.

Contacts: Jane Lindsay
welcome@firstunitarianottawa.ca

W&M2 Greeters

Greeters at each Sunday service prepare the handout materials, greet people as they arrive for worship, act as ushers, assist with the elevator, and serve at the Green Mug Table. Training is offered for new volunteers.

Contacts: Barb Ryan
welcome@firstunitarianottawa.ca

W&M3 Membership

Handle the membership application process. Organize workshops to build connections with FirstU. Conduct welcome services. Report member status.

Contacts: Carol Card
welcome@firstunitarianottawa.ca

W&M4 Newcomer Outreach & Engagement

Follow up with visitors and inquiries. Organize newcomer workshops and events. Maintain relevant information on our website.

Contacts: Brent Nicolle
welcome@firstunitarianottawa.ca

W&M5 Welcome Table

Set up welcome table on Sundays and welcome newcomers.

Contacts: Mary Jackson
welcome@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Women's Pagan Circle

We are an inclusive circle, and welcome Women+ for marginalized gender, including women, non-binary & gender non-conforming.

This space centers around women's experiences with spirituality. We meet on week nights but vary the days of the week to accommodate people's schedules.

We meet every 6 weeks to celebrate the Sabbats and cross-quarter days in ritual.

Gathering time: 7pm; Ritual start time: 7:30 pm
Contacts: Laurie Foster-MacLeod
lauren.fosterm@gmail.com

Women's Personal Growth Group

The WPGG meets twice monthly - once in person, once on Zoom. The common theme is growth - spiritual, mental, emotional and learning more about each other in this "Sisterhood".

Contacts: Evelyn Algar & Carmen Contreras
womenspg@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Women's Spiritual Growth Circle*

This group meets monthly to seek ways to support our spiritual awakening. This group might be open to new participants at a future time.

Contacts: Lisa Boulay
Lboulay111@gmail.com

Worship Team and Worship Associates

The Worship Associates work with the minister to develop and participate in Sunday services.

Contacts: Lisa Boulay
worshipteam@firstunitarianottawa.ca