



First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

The Parkway Spire

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Deadline for next Spire submissions:
February 15, 2025



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"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"

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Facing Windows

~ Rev. Eric Meter



I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.

That comment by E. B. White (as quoted by Israel Shenker, "[E. B. White: Notes and Comments by Author](#)," *The New York Times*, 11 July 1969) is one I return to so often that I probably owe White's estate a significant portion of my pension.

I write this on Friday, November 15th. I began drafting this column on Sunday, November 3rd. Since then, so much has happened that what then sounded noteworthy has paled in light of political realities and potentials taking place south of our country's border.

What I began writing was a tribute to two worship services from that morning I watched via streaming. The first was from our sibling congregation in Kingston. The second was from our own Worship Hall where Jenn Bernston led a discussion on music's meaning in our lives. If you haven't watched it, I recommend you do. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vycR5Rfq0j0>)

That morning in Kingston, our sibling congregation was celebrating ministry, specifically the 50th anniversary of their minister emerita's ordination, and the 25th anniversary of their affiliated minister's ordination. Those clergy are the Revs. Kathy Sage, and Wendy Luella Perkins, respectively, and I was glad to have finally met them in person just a few days before.

The celebration in Kingston was a bit of a lovefest, but one of lived experience, not just hope. (Professional clergy secret: this is why ministers often enjoy officiating at memorials more than weddings.) The community celebrated the specifics of what Kathy and Wendy Luella brought to and

created with the Kingston Unitarian Fellowship. It was, in just two words, lovely and inspiring.

That inspiration was tested when the results of the U.S. presidential election began coming in the following Tuesday evening.

I doubt you need me to offer any details about the election or (as in the news of the last few days) President-Elect Trump's proposed Cabinet nominees. Over thirty folks came out the night after the election for a post-election vigil we scheduled at the end of the summer. And the election remained something many wanted to talk about the following Sunday. (Thanks to Peter Duschinsky for keeping those of us joining him in the Lounge respectful, given the challenging emotions we brought with us.)

While there will be some clear effects of Washington D.C.'s new administration, for us in Canada, many effects will be indirect. I expect few of them to be subtle.

As one of the Wednesday vigil participants commented eloquently, challenging times call for vital communities of love, support and a willingness to work for justice. Even here in Ottawa, our work will be clearer than ever.

I expect us to rise to that challenge, as we have for decades now. I hope we'll also remember to, as E.B. White puts it, enjoy the world. There will always be reason to laugh and sing, to find moments of beauty, to catch one another smiling.

With that in mind, I'll simply close by saying that I look forward to seeing you at 30 Cleary soon.

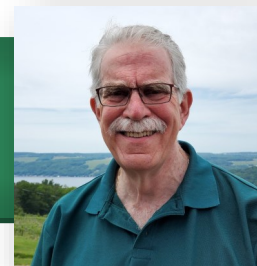
In shared faith,

~ Rev. Eric



Splinters from the Board

~ Chuck Shields



Typical fall weather seemed to take forever to arrive, but the usual fall activity level at the congregation over these few months burst upon us. Our in-gathering service had a strong attendance and everyone had a great time at the BBQ that followed. Sunday services and religious exploration programming have had good participation and the Fall Fair is generating lots of excitement and involvement.

The last few months have also seen progress on the plans to construct the two affordable housing buildings that will be key components of Odayanhaway, our Little Village.

On September 4th Ottawa City Council approved the zoning changes required for constructing these buildings. Also, Aspire Riverview Homes, the corporation that will build and operate the 16-storey building, has been created. However, the name of the building itself has not been selected.

FirstU and Theia Partners will co-own the corporation and have signed the legal documents to sell the land for the building and to establish how it will be managed and operated. The actual transfer of the land won't happen for several months. FirstU will be the majority shareholder of the corporation and will also have three of the five seats on the corporation's board. The FirstU Board issued a call for expressions of interest to serve on the Aspire Board, conducted interviews with respondents and has identified Brent Nicolle, Lisa Sharp and Bill Van Iterson as the congregation's representatives.

Work has been ongoing with Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services to finalize the document that will transfer the land they will use to construct their six-

storey building. It is anticipated that this will be concluded soon.

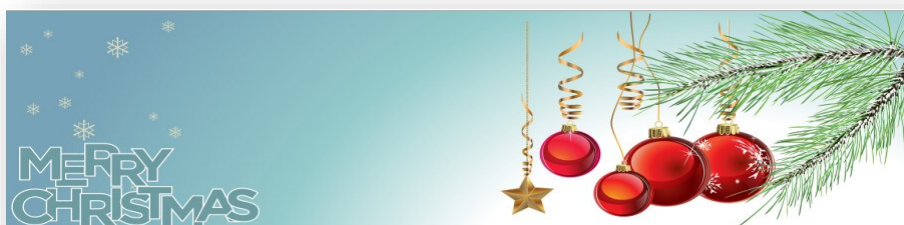
Meanwhile, work has begun to secure financing from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and to finalize the site and construction plans. On November 4th a charette was held with representatives from FirstU, Unitarian House, River Parkway Children's Centre, OAHs and Theia Partners and their design team to review and comment on the draft site plan that presents how the project will fit with the rest of the campus. This was a very positive session and provided an opportunity for participants to talk together, share their thoughts and do productive problem-solving. This was the first of a number of consultation sessions.

Once the city approves the site plan that is created through that process and if timely funding is received from CMHC, construction could start in late August or early September next year, 2025. Construction on the two buildings will be done at the same time because the foundation and parking garage will stretch under both buildings. With a fall 2025 start, it is expected that the first residents could move into the 16-storey building in December 2027. Construction of the OAHs building will probably be faster as it is smaller and their residents might be able to move in sooner.

As the planning process continues, the team that is overseeing FirstU's involvement with the project will be sharing regular updates.

~ submitted by Chuck Shields

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RE-flections: Our Whole Lives

~ Jodi McIntosh



Let's dive into Our Whole Lives (OWL), an innovative sexuality education program co-created by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and the United Church of Christ. This program is all about providing age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education for everyone—from little ones in kindergarten to older adults. OWL is designed to help people understand sexuality in a positive way, empowering them to make informed choices throughout their lives.

One of the standout features of OWL is how inclusive it is! It recognizes that sexuality is a key part of being human and tackles this important topic in a way that fits each stage of life. For the younger kids, OWL introduces the basics like body awareness, consent, and respect for themselves and others. As they grow, the curriculum dives into more complex topics like relationships, puberty, gender and sexual identity, sexual health, and emotional well-being. And as they transition into adulthood, the focus shifts to healthy relationships, self-acceptance, and navigating life changes, all while emphasizing the importance of community support. This thoughtful progression ensures everyone gets the right information at the right time, promoting a lifelong understanding of sexuality that's respectful and informed.

At its core, OWL is a sex-positive program. It encourages participants to embrace their sexuality as a natural and healthy part of life. By fostering open conversations about sexual health, relationships, and consent, OWL helps break down the stigma often surrounding these topics. This not only boosts individual understanding but also creates a culture of respect and acceptance in our communities. Participants learn to appreciate the diversity of human experiences and to approach sexuality with curiosity and care.

But OWL isn't just about sharing knowledge; it's about building a solid foundation for healthy

relationships and self-acceptance. By engaging with the curriculum, participants develop critical thinking skills and learn to navigate their own feelings and those of others. In today's society, where discussions around sexuality and gender identity can be sensitive, comprehensive sexuality education is more important than ever. It equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to navigate complex issues, fostering understanding and respect for diverse identities and experiences. By promoting open dialogue and critical thinking, sexuality education helps counter misinformation and stigma, empowering individuals to advocate for their rights and the rights of others. In a time when access to accurate information can be challenging, OWL stands as a vital resource, ensuring that everyone has the tools they need to make informed choices and engage in respectful conversations.

At FirstU, we are proud to have a long-standing tradition of offering OWL classes for children and youth. We also have several newly trained facilitators ready to start offering OWL classes for adults. Our commitment to this program reflects our dedication to fostering a supportive environment where individuals can explore their identities and relationships in a safe space.

As part of our broader Religious Exploration Program, we are excited to announce that we will be offering OWL for grades 4-6 starting in January. We can't wait to help foster a new generation of informed, respectful and empowered individuals!

OWL for Grade 4-6 : Jan 12th-Apr 13th

(No class Feb 16th, Mar 9th, Mar 16th)

Sunday Mornings 10:30-11:50

Parent Information session on December 15th from 11:30-12:30, childcare provided.

Please contact Jodi at DRE@firstunitarianottawa.ca for more information.

Remember Our Old Building?



A few months ago I was walking along Elgin Street and noticed that the building our congregation moved out of in the 1960s was looking somewhat worse for wear, with fallen stones, wooden braces, tarps, and a construction fence, as seen in this recent photo.

I was curious to discover what is happening. But first some history, sourced from Jean Ahmed's 1999 publication "So Far - So Good!, A Chronology of the first 100 years of Unitarianism in Ottawa".

A lot at the corner of Elgin and Lewis Streets was purchased in 1899 from J.R. Booth for \$1,000. The same year, an adjoining lot on Lewis Street was purchased and \$5,000 was budgeted to construct a new building seating 250 people in the sanctuary. The church was officially opened on October 28, 1900 under the name "The Church of Our Father (Unitarian)".

In 1965, the congregation sold this building to Église Unie Saint-Marc, a French speaking congregation of

the United Church of Canada. The Unitarians met at Elgin Street Public School until moving to our current campus and building (now known as 30 Cleary Ave) in the spring of 1967. The land for the new church had been purchased in 1964, after much debate in congregational meetings. Some members wanted to use the Elgin Street location to erect a combination of church and revenue-producing builds, foreshadowing in some respects what we're now preparing to do on our Cleary Ave campus.

Coming back to 2024, one of my questions was if Église Unie Saint-Marc still owns the building. The next step in finding the answer came during a mid-October walk in my own neighbourhood of Sandy Hill, when I saw the sign in the next photo, at the corner of Cumberland and Daly.



This sign told me that Église Unie Saint-Marc is currently meeting in the former St. Paul's-Eastern United Church building on Cumberland

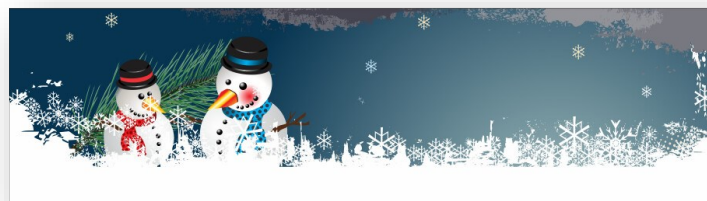
Street. The St. Paul's congregation disbanded in 2021. The sign also has a photo of the Elgin Street building, showing a stone tower at the corner of Elgin and Lewis that has fallen down or been removed for safety reasons, as seen in the first photo.

I subsequently found the final clue, the following sign posted on a side door of the old Unitarian building.



To paraphrase what the sign says in French: "Because of work to renovate the tower of the church, our services are currently taking place at St. Paul's United Church at 473 Cumberland Street". My conclusion from this information is that Église Unie Saint-Marc still owns our previous building, plans to renovate it, and intends to resume meeting there after the renovations. Plus ça change!

~ submitted by Maury Prevost



Nurturing the Meditation Gardens

In the final stanza of his poem, *A Psalm of Life*, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow writes:

*Let us, then, be up and doing
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing.
Learn to labour and to wait.*

It would be fitting to apply this message about the virtues of effort and perseverance to the volunteers caring for our Meditation Gardens. There are nine dedicated gardeners in the core team and other occasional support such as from Peggy Trevanion, a Master Gardener who belongs to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the North Hills (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania). The team is fortunate to have Peggy's help and expertise during her six-week summer visits with her daughter in Ottawa.

Much of a gardener's work is routine and repetitive, including weeding, watering, composting, inspecting and treating plants for harmful insects or diseases, cleaning bird baths, raking paths, and identifying and eliminating invasive species. In late winter, there is an urgency to organize the gardens for a new season by cleaning up after the season's ravages, pruning back shrubbery, and re-installing our intricate watering system. Then, eight months later, there is the need to: protect vulnerable shrubs and trees from rabbit destruction; mulch and fertilize; clean and inventory tools and supplies; plant bulbs; and in many other ways prepare the

gardens for the freezing months ahead.

The reward for this work is found in the circle of life journey. Along the way, there are many opportunities to observe and marvel at the miracles of nature. The flora and fauna enjoyed a mild winter this year, and their ample stored vitality surged into a spectacular richness of growth in early spring. This extra energy continued to create a particularly lush 2024 summer environment. A highlight was to witness a colony of bullfrogs that made the garden stream their habitat.



An abundance of bees and butterflies feasted on a nectar buffet in the two newly established pollinator gardens. One of these gardens was cultivated in the previous season with seeds from an Ottawa Wildflower Seed Library giveaway event. This grassroots organization promotes wildflower gardening with native plants using seeds from trusted sources. For the other, larger pollinator plot, the team transplanted small seedlings, purchased in late spring from the Fletcher Wildlife Garden at the Central Experimental Farm. An ideal

location, good growing medium, and favourable weather resulted in various seedlings growing to over a metre tall with blooms in early July.



Since the seeds from the Meditation Gardens have a trusted source, they can be harvested and donated to the Wildflower Library for distribution to the wider community. Such a contribution adds to the many ways the gardens have become an invaluable resource that continues to inspire the work of the garden volunteers.

*~ submitted by Susan Mellor,
Friends of the Meditation Gardens*



Another Wonderful Fall Fair!

Well, the Fall Fair is over for another year. It has been a wonderful event!

We would like to say a big thank you to the FirstU staff:

- ♥ To **Operations Manager Jen Brennan** who created the maps and Fall Fair Guide for our customers. She worked with the construction people to find a parking area for volunteers and helped make signs for Richmond and Byron.
- ♥ To **Finance Manager Michelle Jackson** who did square training with volunteers. She had created a schedule to streamline the process.
- ♥ To **Dee, our Lead Custodian**, who did a great job of cleaning up and organizing the grow tower room for volunteer breaks and lunches. Dee also made sure the rest of the building was in great shape for the Fall Fair.
- ♥ To **Reverend Eric** who encouraged Catherine to do this public speaking and handed out the Fall Fair Guides and served coffee to our shoppers who arrived early in the morning.
- ♥ And a big thank you to all of the **coordinators, convenors and their volunteers** who helped to make this year's Fall Fair a success. From removing the hymnals last Sunday, to transforming this building into the Fall Fair event, and then quickly back into shape for the Sunday service.



Mary Ella Keblusek dressed in a yellow slicker directing traffic to Cleary Ave.

There were tons of donations, lots of shoppers, great displays, not to mention "parking in interesting times"!

As I checked in on rooms before the big day, I found volunteers hard at work; sorting, doing some ironing, determining prices and organizing. Some of the volunteers told me that they enjoy their work at Fall Fair, and the tasks are not onerous because they meet other volunteers here once a year and love the week that they spend together, working with others for a cause that they believe in.

I have to mention that sharing food together with other volunteers at lunchtime during the week before Fall Fair is always a treat here. The soups, made by volunteers, were amazing. For me it was wonderful being able to spend time talking

with people that I do not typically spend time with.

I want to let you know that you are an amazing bunch of people, and it shows in the community spirit that you have. To me Fall Fair really is about building Community!

~ submitted by Catherine Pope and Mary Ella Keblusek



Andrew Drake managing the finance operation.



Carol Card (former FF director) and Catherine Pope (2024 FF director) celebrate at the end of the day.

Thankyou
Dedicated
Supportive
Hardworking
UnitarianUniversalists
Volunteers
Connections
Grateful
Amazing
Community
Awesome
Relationships
Resourceful
Fun

Climate Win for Local Activist Environmental Action Group (EAG)

You might have heard about an exciting victory in the youth-led climate case (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/court-of-appeal-ontario-decision-1.7356540>)

against the Ontario provincial government, but you might not know that the case has an Ottawa connection.

One of the youth bringing the case forward is Ottawa freelance fashion designer Alex Neufeldt. If you've done any work in the Ottawa climate community you have probably crossed paths with Alex. She is active on municipal, provincial and national climate issues, and pretty darn great to work with.

Alex signed up five years ago, when she was 23, to be a plaintiff in the case against the provincial government. It's a big commitment, with trips back and forth to Toronto for hearings, and potentially years more to go.

Recently, when Alex was a panelist at a climate conference, we asked her what it felt like to give her name and face to such a public and powerful challenge to the status quo. Climate change shouldn't be a controversial topic,

but it is. Activists can be targeted for online vitriol or worse. We were interested in how she faced these risks and wondered how she was able to be so brave.

Alex's response? "Get a good lawyer." Luckily, she and the other plaintiffs have several! The case is supported by Ecojustice (<https://ecojustice.ca/genclimateaction/>), Canada's largest environmental law charity.

Ecojustice has helped the seven youth plaintiffs to argue that their constitutional rights are being violated by Ontario's weakened climate targets. When Premier Ford came into office, the province's target was to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 37 per cent below 1990 levels by 2030. The Ford government reduced this to 30 per cent below 2005 levels (much higher than 1990 levels).

New governments are allowed to have different policies than their predecessors. However, the plaintiffs argue that the weakened target infringes on their Charter rights to life and security of the person. And since the devastating impacts of climate change will be felt

disproportionately by youth, the provincial government's policy change discriminates based on age.

The Ontario Court of Appeal recently unanimously decided that the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* applies in this case, and ordered the lower court to hear the case. This precedent-setting decision is the first ruling establishing that a government's climate actions are subject to the Charter.

We find this case to be a great example of how all kinds of actions are needed in the climate fight. We need people signing petitions, lobbying politicians, and attending demonstrations. We also need people writing and educating and yes, in the courts.

For more information on how you can get involved, please visit our Climate Action Page: <https://www.firstunitarianottawa.ca/climate-action.html#EnviroElements>.

~ submitted by FirstU's
Environmental Action Group

In Memoriam

Robert Taylor McKinnell, 28 Feb. 1930 - 9 October 2024. Robert was the long-standing friend of Joan Tutton; father of Alistair, Ian, David and Michael (sons of Robert and M. Gwen Watson, deceased 2022); and much loved grandfather.



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