



Inside this issue

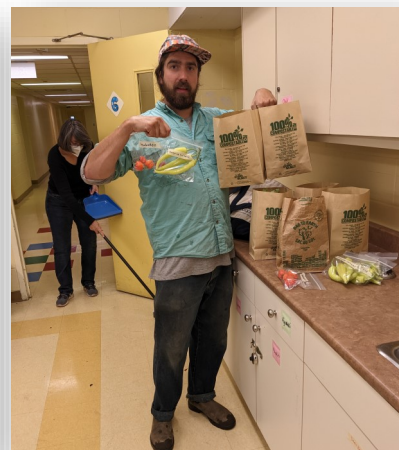
Caring Contacts	1
Facing Windows - Rev. Eric	2
Splinters from the Board	3
Meet a Member: Stephen St-Denis	4
In Memoriam	4
News from the Social Justice Action Network	5-6
From the Right Relations Team	6
Update on CUC Events in May	7
2023 Renewal Task Force	8
FirstU Information	9

Deadline for next Spire submissions:
May 15, 2023



Ajashki is Thriving!

For more info on how this project is growing see the SJAN (Social Justice Action Network) Report on page 5.



The flourishing grow towers in the Volunteer centre; Ajashki's Master Gardener and Instructor Kayoki Whiteduck.

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

March

Carmen Contreras
calesco@rogers.com
613-565-3613

Coral Sato
csato143@gmail.com
613-599-8838

April

Anne Nagy
anne.nagy@rogers.com
613-614-6171

Maury Prevost
mmprevost@sympatico.ca
613-231-7391

May

Barb Ryan
ryanbarb99@gmail.com
613-710-3131

Marilen Gerber
gerber5@sympatico.ca
613-843-1688

Facing Windows

~ Rev. Eric Meter



During my sermon on Sunday, January 15, I mentioned my understanding that the rock art cairns along the bank of the Ottawa River at Remic Rapids were constructed with the aid of some sort of adhesive. Afterward, several of you let me know this was not the case. The stones stand on their own. To the artist, John Ceprano, and all fans of his magnificent creations, my sincere apologies. Seems I'm more of a muggle than I'd like to be when it comes to imagination and disbelief in what is possible. (If Mr. Ceprano would ever welcome the efforts of an untrained assistant this season, I'm happy to volunteer.)

Thankfully, you kindly let me know when I'm off-base.

That's one of the benefits of being part of a community of faith. We call each other forward, share what nuggets of wisdom we've found along the way and offer one another suggestions for course corrections as needed.

With this in mind, I cannot wait until May when we and the Unitarian Fellowship of Ottawa host the Canadian Unitarian Council's first in-person conference since 2018. I am looking forward to meeting many Unitarian Universalists from across Canada as we gather to share the ways we are finding to lead the most satisfying and meaningful lives possible.

The CUC National Symposium, as the event is officially called, will take place at both 30 Cleary (for

youth programs) and Algonquin College (for everything else).

By the time you read this, registration should be open. Look under Events at www.cuc.ca.

The work of the symposium will be to explore how we can best live into the new 8th Principle of our faith which calls us "to dismantle racism and systemic barriers to full inclusion in ourselves and our institutions."

Rev. Diane Rollert from Montreal and Ottawa's Rev. Fulgence Ndagijimana will be joining me in leading the Sunday worship service, and Elder Albert Dumont, Ottawa's English Language Poet Laureate and friend of our congregation will be our keynote speaker that Saturday morning. As well, staff and other leaders of Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services will be involved during the symposium.

I'm letting you know about this so that you'll mark your calendars (May 19 – 21, 2023), register early, and also be part of making the event the success it can be. Yes, volunteer. Yes, you.

When I was serving another congregation earlier in my career, the UUA's General Assembly came to town. It was a lot of work, beginning months beforehand. During the conference itself, my primary role was as host of the congregation's Partner Church minister from overseas. All told, he stayed with Ann and me for a month, and during the conference he was in high

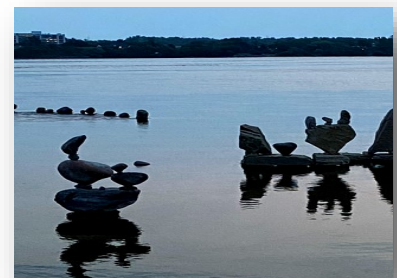
demand meeting religious leaders from North America and across the globe. As we moved from one engagement to the next, we'd pass congregation members wearing vests that read *Ask Me*, helping folks navigate the conference. More often than not, they had smiles on their faces. With a modicum of training they were able to help other participants go where they wanted to go, and recommend places for lunch nearby that might not be too crowded.

So if Kathy Yach or Maury Prevost or other members of our Host Team reach out to you, asking if you can help, I would suggest you respond in line with the spiritual practice of leading with Yes.

Leading with Yes will never guarantee staying in control. It will never keep anyone safe. But doing so will open doors to fuller engagement both within this community of faith and the larger Unitarian Universalist world. There are great folks beyond 30 Cleary, siblings we have yet to meet.

And who knows, it may even lead you to helping create a whole new crop of cairns along the Ottawa River.

In shared faith,
~ Rev. Eric



Splinters from the Board ~ Brent Nicolle



Aiming for Harmonious

The Master Concept Plan (MCP) for our Affordable Housing project, unveiled to the congregation in January, was the subject of much discussion, including two general Town Halls held in February. Please review the MCP on our website if you haven't already and provide your feedback before a membership vote, likely in March. Let me share some feedback with you now.

The MCP document starts with four motivational adjectives, intended to measure the eventual success of the project: Aspirational, Inclusive, Sustainable and Feasible. These words were the result of a brainstorming exercise at a Design Charette last August. I thought it was an interesting exercise: if you were writing the press release for the project's eventual Grand Opening, did those four adjectives capture all the desired sentiments?

It turns out that Celia, a board member from River Parkway Children's Centre (RPCC), felt that a word was missing: "Harmonious". She shared this in a special meeting with the RPCC Board, wherein their concerns were aired. That meeting could easily have become inharmonious, since one of their biggest concerns was the proposed location of the Mixed Rental building immediately outside of their front entrance. (RPCC is a tenant to FirstU and sits on the southwest corner of our campus.) But we, the landlord, agreed with them and expressed our hope to move this building further west toward the fence.

After all, that would preserve more space for our Meditation Gardens.

That harmony is a delicate balance. Days later, our neighbours across the western fence started reaching out with concerns about developments moving too close to the fence. Hmm, yes, we need to talk. More importantly, we need to listen.

At our town halls, divergent opinions often appeared. Werner expressed interest in a taller mixed rental building, and Judy and Ceilidh asked if a shorter building was feasible. Some felt that there was not enough parking, and some felt there was not enough greenspace. I am grateful the opinions were respectfully given and respectfully received.

It seems we don't need to agree, to be harmonious.

Finally, it's worth mentioning again: On Wednesday February 8th, we held an in-person Town Hall, the first time since before COVID! Also notably, we were delighted to hear in person from Justin Marchand, the eloquent CEO of our Indigenous housing partner, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS). Attendees also had a chance to meet about ten senior staff from OAHS, at a reception with refreshments offered by OAHS. It was truly serendipitous for us that OAHS was meeting in Ottawa, and I was very glad to see people from FirstU come for this special occasion.

~ submitted by Brent Nicolle, President
president@firstunitarianottawa.ca



Meet a Member: Stephen St-Denis



I've been attending FirstU since 2007 and have been retired from Statistics Canada since 2018, where I worked in the IT field.

I will be turning 60 later this year. Surprisingly I find this to be less traumatic than when I turned 30. At 2½ years old I was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, and was told I would never walk normally. I don't think my parents fully understood the gravity of the situation because shortly after my diagnosis we moved from a bungalow to a two-story house. It had zero accessibility, not even a grab bar anywhere in the house. I can remember grabbing onto the door frames by

my fingertips, to get myself into position. I don't think I'd have the nerve to do that today, but I never fell down the stairs once in 25 years.

My primary education was in a "special needs class", which is a nice way to say segregated. We had no contact with the non-disabled kids. I guess they were trying to protect us, but you can only keep kids in a bubble for so long. For me that bubble burst when I went to high school. I was the only disabled kid in my class. It felt like being thrown into the deep end of a pool and told to sink or swim. I wanted to prove to the world, and mostly myself, that I was just as smart as anyone else. On my first report card, one of my teachers wrote "Stephen is trying too hard. He should slow down." I became a straight A student. I got along well with my classmates, but was never invited to parties on the weekends or for summer vacation get-togethers.

After acceptance at the University of Waterloo, one of the top schools for Computer Science in North America, I found each year progressively harder, and by 4th year I was burnt out so decided to take a term off and combine that with summer vacation. Thinking I was all set to go, two months later I became very depressed and realized my previous episode was not burn out, but depression. Back then mental health was not a highly visible issue in society. Managing to slog it through, I ended up on the Dean's Honour List upon graduation.

What attracts me to FirstU is its strong emphasis on social justice. I've also been a member of a grass roots advocacy organization called Results Canada for over 30 years. Its mission is to end global poverty. We have, over the years, helped direct billions of dollars towards proven anti-poverty initiatives.

~ written by Stephen St-Denis with assistance from Carl Sonnen

In Memoriam

Brian Kopke ~ 31 December 2022, husband of Margie (née Saxon), father of Sam. Minister at First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa from 1985 to 2007

Paul Mrstik ~ 6 July 2022, son of the late Frank and Mary Mrstik, former members of First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

Julia Mary MacAngus ~ 14 November 2022, daughter of Shirley Fleming and John MacAngus, granddaughter of former long-time First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa member, Margaret MacAngus

John Johnson (Johnny) ~ 10 February 2023, husband of June (née Reid) for over 73 years, father of Allan (Wendi), grandfather of 6. Pre-deceased by three of his siblings and his daughter Rae Johnson

News from the Social Justice Action Network (SJAN)

Environmental Action Group: Bill 23: Why the Concern?

Bill 23, the *More Homes Built Faster Act*, is a massive Act overturning previous provincial plans regarding land planning, flood protection and municipal rights to appeal. It favours developers over elected municipal public servants. Along with associated policy changes, its passing will:

- facilitate the sale of conservation lands without environmental oversight
- strip powers from conservation authorities
- remove protections from woodlands, wetlands and wildlife habitats
- impose farm-eating sprawl on municipalities like Hamilton, Halton and Waterloo that chose to build more homes within city limits (Environmental Defense)

The Bill applies to all of Ontario, but will immediately affect the Golden Horseshoe and soon, Ottawa, where a large number of remaining wetlands still exist.

This Act, gestating for many years, did not spring forth overnight. It was planned to be enacted swiftly, followed by a very short time for perusal and response.

Behind the scenes, municipalities like Hamilton and Halton had refused to follow Ontario government dictates, continuing to follow original regulations. In late October 2022, the government of Ontario tabled the "More Homes Built Faster Act". It was passed on November 28. Protections that were in place before were suddenly stripped from municipal and conservation authorities. Now, building could take place even in floodplains. The use of rural

conservation land encourages large lots and large homes, far from public transit and areas in need of affordable homes.

This bill will not result in more affordable homes being built, but rather severe and irreversible damage to the environment, wetlands, farmland and quality of parks. Developers will become very wealthy at our expense.

Wetlands are a very important natural feature that have taken over 10,000 years to form. Not only do wetlands protect wildlife and support biodiversity, they also sequester more carbon than forests. When destroyed, they release that carbon into the atmosphere. Wetlands perform other vital functions. They protect us from flooding, drought and climate change. Nature's water filter, they cleanse pollutants flowing through them, providing safe drinking water and allowing native flora and fauna to flourish.

Water IS life. We must protect this vital resource to survive. Yet we take it for granted because it has been so abundant and readily available. Abundance will not last if we do not value it.

Ontario has about 35 million hectares of wetlands, which are quickly disappearing in southern Ontario. We urgently need to conserve what's left, since most of the population lives in southern Ontario.

There has been huge opposition to Bill 23 from municipalities, environmental groups and individual citizens. Check the Climate Action Page to follow ongoing action, and support environmental groups with

letters and donations for court challenges.

~ submitted by Matilda Samuel

Citations:

Jan 6, 2023 <https://ecojustice.ca/the-ford-government-is-trying-to-sell-off-our-natural-heritage/>

Environmental Defense Webinar: *Bait and Switch: Understanding Bill 23, The 'More Sprawl, Fewer Wetlands' Act*; Nov 7, 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUXtBOaynR4>

How a Focus on Climate Change Led to Green Sanctuary and to Ajashki

For over 3 years now, the Environmental Action Group (EAG) has been working hard on our congregational social justice priority, confronting the climate catastrophe. And we're hoping this work will lead to our accreditation as a Green Sanctuary congregation.

As you may recall, Green Sanctuary is a Unitarian Universalist Association program which, since 2020, has focused on the climate emergency by encouraging congregations to take 'bold, urgent and effective climate-action and climate-justice work'. FirstU was one of the first congregations to jump on board with the refocused program and our feedback has been instrumental in molding the program, making it easier – and less bureaucratic! – for those who have come after us.

Green Sanctuary requires action in three program areas – mitigation, adaptation and resilience, and climate justice. It encourages a collaborative, whole-congregation approach.

....continued on page 6

continued from page 5...

That's why we're particularly thrilled with Ajashki, FirstU's Indigenous-led food security and climate change initiative. Ajashki grew out of Green Sanctuary's call for climate justice work, for initiatives that move us beyond a charity model (simply giving money), to actively collaborating with a marginalized group at risk of being unduly impacted by climate change. Led by Kayoki Whiteduck, a young Algonquin Anishinaabe horticulturalist and farmer, Ajashki brings together Indigenous youth – our Future Food Warriors (FFWs) – helping them connect with the land and develop skills for future employment.

Ajashki is a true model of collaboration, having signed 'friendly agreements' with the Friends of the Meditation Gardens for joint work on composting and with Religious Exploration for the children's 'heart garden' among others. Ajashki is continuing throughout the winter, growing greens in the aeroponic towers provided by the Parkdale Food Centre and this year, has a special grant for an art project which will result in a video led and created by the FFWs.

Ajashki is a key element of our Green Sanctuary work. It is not just an EAG project; it belongs to all of us. Take time to find out more and see what you can do to support it.

~ submitted by Environmental Action Group

From the Right Relations Team

Greetings from the Right Relations Team (Marilen Gerber, Lena Jones, Jennifer Reid, Lisa Boulay and Rev. Ellen Bell).

As 2023 unfolds with all its anticipated and unanticipated joys and challenges, we are reminded that life is not static, and that change is constant. We will no doubt look to ourselves and each other for support as we navigate this year. Social interactions form the basis of our relationships with one another; a complex web of relationships, in turn, forms a community. The health of any community is dependent on the health of those myriad of individual interactions which are the building blocks of the community.

Fortunately, we have our Relational Covenant to help us along the way. Affirmed by our congregation in June 2020, our Relational Covenant states that:

I will strive to honour our Congregational Covenant and our Unitarian Universalist principles by:

- Speaking for myself with honesty.
- Being aware of how my words and actions may affect others.
- Listening. Assuming good intentions. Remembering that people differ

in their perceptions, previous experience and communication styles.

- Interacting respectfully. Acknowledging other people's views and confirming my understanding of what is being said.
- Speaking directly to a person with whom I disagree rather than about them. Engaging a third party to mediate, if needed.
- Following through with actions on my promises and commitments.
- Serving as I am able with my time, talents and treasures.
- Celebrating our diversity by ensuring that all feel welcome and included.

The Right Relations Team reminds all of us to refer to the Relational Covenant in our interactions with others.

May we all do our part to remember and honour the Relational Covenant to maintain and promote respectful, caring relationships with one another and create a healthy, thriving beloved community.

All the best to each of you in 2023.

~ submitted by Lisa Boulay on behalf of the Right Relations Team



Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC) Activities: Update on CUC Events in Ottawa in May

Organizers are putting the finishing touches on the program for the May 19-21, 2023 national Symposium in Ottawa on *Living into the 8th Principle*. Held on the Algonquin College campus on Woodroffe Ave, the weekend will include something for all ages. The youth conference, CanUUdle, will take place at 30 Cleary Ave.

At the time of writing, the Symposium website and registration for the various age groups were not yet open, but this is expected to change by the time of publication. Please keep an eye on the weekly eUU newsletter for confirmation and links.

Full details of the weekend's program will be available when the website and registration open. Here's some of what will be happening:

- The CUC's Annual General Meeting will take place on Friday, May 19 at 1:00-4:30pm Eastern, in person at Algonquin College and online by Zoom. Observers are welcome.
- Also happening on Friday will be the Opening Ceremony at 6:30 pm and the Confluence Lecture at 7:45pm. Both of these events will be open to all, in-person and online. There will be an in-person reception following the lecture by Rev. Julie Stoneberg on the topic of *Open Minds / Closed Doors*.



- On Saturday morning, May 20 at 9:30 am, the Keynote Speaker will be Algonquin Elder, Albert Dumont.
- The rest of Saturday morning and afternoon will feature two workshops in four program streams, available in-person or online to people registered.
- Saturday evening at 8:30 pm, there will be a social event primarily in the form of an 'all ages talent show'.
- On Sunday morning, May 21 at 10:30am-12:00pm, there will be a National Worship Service, *Covenanting Through Transitions*, open to all, in-person and online (livestreamed on [CUC's YouTube channel](#)). Our own Rev. Eric Meter will play a leading role. There will not be a FirstU service that Sunday.
- Sunday lunch and afternoon will feature multi-generational activities and workshops (in-person only).
- Sunday evening there will be a banquet, awards, and Closing Ceremony.

- OWL Facilitator training is from Sunday late afternoon through Tuesday, May 23.

Volunteer recruitment at FirstU will ramp up in March, with in-person contacts and follow-up with people who have already indicated their interest. We need volunteers for the Symposium, including the children's program, and the youth conference at FirstU. More specific needs will be communicated through these activities and the eUU. Volunteers for the children's program and overnight hosts at the youth conference will need police checks, so time is of the essence.

Volunteers can also sign up by contacting our Volunteer Coordinator, Kathy Yach, at:

uuconnections@firstunitarianottawa.ca, or via the CUC website at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdpqrYOZ6Bhn_nEI2txbwa4dmmXAboszH9rAy3gRIrGLMVm3A/viewform.

For other information about the Symposium, or for answers to questions, contact Host Team Lead Maury Prevost at:

uuconnections@firstunitarianottawa.ca.

~ submitted by Maury Prevost on behalf of the Host Team

2023 Renewal Task Force

We have been through some difficult years, but now we are coming back. Whatever draws you here, religious exploration, social justice, spirituality or community, FirstU is back and ready to go. The FirstU Board has formed a Renewal Task Force.

Twenty years ago, we were in a golden era. We had a thriving RE and youth program, a strong adult program, and vigorous social justice activities. We had a Bangladeshi man in sanctuary, living within these walls for eighteen months, until the government recognized him as a refugee. Money can't buy that public visibility. At the end, we had the honour of presenting a brief on Canada's refugee system to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Refugees and Immigration. Our refugee program has continued through all these years, successfully changing the lives of many people, bringing them to safety from dangerous and difficult places.

But about 15 years ago, demographics began to catch up to us. With fewer people pushing a large number of projects, our social justice activities began to diminish. We had to refocus, do more with fewer people. We moved to broader themes that the entire congregation got behind – multi-faith housing, climate justice, reconciliation. New leaders stepped forward, but now they too are beginning to age.

Then there was COVID. Attendance and revenue dropped, just when we had to invest huge amounts in the online technology we now use. A monumental effort went into adapting to the new reality, and by and large, we succeeded.

But there was another casualty of COVID, our sense of community. We stopped seeing each other. Many programs were suspended. There was no coffee hour. We fought back, on Zoom, hospitality hour, trivia night, discussion groups. This helped a great deal, but there were still people we hadn't seen in person for years, or

people we had never seen without a mask. It's a long road back.

But we survived. We have a strong new minister who intends to stay. We have thriving, focused social justice programs. [We developed the award winning Ajashki project.](#) We are attracting young people and our RE and youth programs are once again growing. COVID is, fingers crossed, on the way to becoming something we just live with. We are once again in the building business, planning to add affordable housing to our beautiful property.

The renewal task force includes Phil Nagy, Mary Jackson, Maryan O'Hagan, and Lee Rose. Our mandate includes increasing volunteerism and participation, sprucing up and modernizing our physical plant, and driving the annual fall pledge campaign. You can reach us at:

Renewal@FirstUnitarianOttawa.ca

Stay tuned for more exciting news.

~ submitted by Phil Nagy



Published quarterly, **The Parkway Spire** welcomes unformatted articles (**maximum 450 words please**) along with photos (high resolution jpg format is preferred) of interest to the congregation. We also welcome one feature article for each issue of the Spire, **maximum 900 words**. Articles may be edited if necessary. Submissions should be sent to spire@firstunitarianottawa.ca no later than the 15th of the month prior to publication. Next submission deadline: **May 15, 2023**.



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.

2022–2023 Board of Directors bod@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Brent Nicolle: President president@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Mary Ella Keblusek: Vice President

Phil Nagy: Treasurer

Amy Bérubé: Secretary

David Chernushenko, Caycee Price, Carl Sonnen: Members at Large

Lisa Sharp: Past President

Program Staff

Rev. Eric Meter, Minister minister@firstunitarianottawa.ca 613-371-0595

Jenn Berntson, Music Director music@firstunitarianottawa.ca x230

Kirk Adsett, Interim Music Director, music@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Rev. Ellen Bell, Spiritual Care Visitor spiritualcare@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Lay Chaplains

Guy Belleperche, Lisa Boulay, Alex Campbell

Administrative Staff

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

Michelle Jackson, Finance Manager fm@firstunitarianottawa.ca, can be contacted Monday-Thursday, 9:30 am – 4 pm at 343-987-8560 (or leave a message at the church office, ext 222)

Allison Armstrong, Communications Coordinator (e-UU and Communiqué) publications@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Building Staff

Julia Defalco, Audiovisual Coordinator av@firstunitarianottawa.ca x223

Lori Clarke, Facility Manager facmgr@firstunitarianottawa.ca x224

Jodi McIntosh and 'D' Mollena, Custodians custodians@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Spire Contributors

Lisa Boulay, Donna Bowen-Willer, Alexandra Devine, Rev. Eric Meter, Phil Nagy, Brent Nicolle, Maryan O'Hagan, Maury Prevost, Matilda Samuel, Carl Sonnen, Stephen St-Denis

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Editor: Marg Lee Layout: Jan Andrews

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