



First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

The Parkway Spire

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Deadline for next Spire submissions:
Aug 15, 2023



Why can't they "Just Get Over It"? Read about a thought-provoking workshop that answers this question on page 4!

How did the CUC Symposium go? Get the scoop on page 8!

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



Eleven months ago, Vyda Ng, the executive director of the Canadian Unitarian Council, asked me semi-formally if we would help host the first multi-platform nationwide gathering since 2018. To questions like that, my answer is almost always going to be 'Yes', some how we'll get it done.

Well, with a big helping hand from members of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa, CUC staff and near countless volunteers from Ottawa and beyond, we got it done. The CUC National Symposium was, by all accounts, a comprehensive success. (For more information and great photographs from the event, please see Maury Prevost's article elsewhere in this issue.)

Hundreds gathered, both in person at Algonquin College and as online participants, over the Victoria Day long weekend.

Albert Dumont, Ottawa's English language poet laureate and friend to our Ajashki program, was the keynote speaker on Saturday morning. And on Sunday morning, Revs. Diane Rollert (from the Unitarian Church of Montreal), Fulgence Ndagijimana (a UU community minister living in Ottawa, though originally from the African nation of Burundi) and I led the national worship service along with a conference choir of singers

from across the nation and inspired musicians from Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal.

Now that the event is over, I look back and notice a few things. The first being how much I enjoyed seeing those of you who were there in person, helping out or just taking it in. Maybe my life is more segmented than many, but I always am delighted when those I know from one setting show up somewhere else.

Second, I want to express my gratitude to those who helped make the gathering the treasure that it was. Namely **Maury** for leading our efforts, **Kathy** for shepherding the many volunteers who made things run as smoothly as they did, **Lisa** for gracefully emceeing the opening ceremony, and **David** for organizing the banner parade and being everywhere at once all weekend long, **the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services staff** who gave up a large part of a holiday weekend for us, and for **Brent** who made sure all the hymnals loaned out for the singalong found their way back to the church. Whew! And that's just the proverbial cream at the top of the list of those who have my deep thanks.

Last, if you weren't there or haven't already watched it online, I suggest you take the time to watch Rev.

Julie Stoneberg's 2023 Confluence Lecture from the opening night of the symposium:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnZGsQWNdME>. Simply put, I cannot recommend it highly enough. She said a great many things I'll be thinking about in the months to come, and I'd love to hear your reactions as well. After you watch it, please let me know what you think.

Now the only question remains: What's up next for us? But I think we know. It's getting ready to make our campus expansion a successful reality. And that, my friends, is work that calls for and will require the best we can give it.

A Return to Sunday Breakfast Forums?

Recently the officers of the congregation's Board and I were talking about how much we miss the pre-pandemic Sunday morning Breakfast Forums prior to our worship services.

If you remember them fondly, or simply think the notion sounds intriguing, please let Mary Ella Keblusek or I know. Monthly Forums are possible, but we'll need to create a team to bring them back to life.

In shared faith,

~ Rev. Eric

Splinters from the Board ~ Brent Nicolle



FirstU is “Everything Everywhere All at Once”

The Academy Award winning movie “Everything Everywhere All at Once”, if you haven’t seen it, is hard to summarize. At its outset, it chronicles a Chinese-American woman who owns and runs a laundromat, and is being audited by the IRS (the American tax agency), while juggling complicated relationships with her elderly father, her misunderstood lesbian daughter, and her concerned husband. Then on the way to an IRS interview, she learns there are alternate universes and how to travel between the two (starting with doing something unusual like putting your shoes on the wrong feet) and there is a crisis brewing that needs her help. It’s like a roller-coaster combination of This Is Us and The Matrix. I enjoyed it, but I realize that recommendations are very subjective. The movie’s title was particularly appropriate on a number of levels.

That title “Everything Everywhere All at Once” can often describe life at FirstU very accurately.

At the time of this writing, we are in the final throes of preparing for the Canadian Unitarian Council’s national Symposium, a rare treat to be held locally, and I am hoping to see many FirstU congregants there as registered participants. Of course, the Symposium also involves considerable volunteer time from FirstU congregants as emcees, scrutineers, ushers, ticket-takers and household hosts. At the same time, there is a concurrent youth conference CanUuddle, which will again engage a cadre of staff and volunteers, as facilitators, drivers, chefs, chaperones and advisors, to provide an enriching experience for Unitarian youth from across Canada. The weekend’s frenetic pace continues with OWL (Our Whole Lives) training for a dedicated collection of FirstU congregants who are

pledging to be facilitators to OWL courses in the future. Many of us are involved in multiple ways this weekend, and might collapse from exhaustion whenever our long weekend is finally over.

At the same time, the garden beckons, and those plants purchased from the Unitarian GoGos annual plant sale need attention. Making our bicycles roadworthy becomes a small but necessary act of climate-change defiance. A message about the Something Old, Something New fundraising campaign prompts a mental reminder to check the backyard fence. An email notification appears, about the upcoming plans for Religious Exploration, or a rallying cry for Poverty Action, or the next book for the reading group. A Facebook message from a dear friend necessitates a follow-up phone call, whether we are in the Caring Network or not. Somehow, we find time.

But sometimes we cannot do everything everywhere all at once. And that’s okay. Some ideas are just too complex to handle with everything else we have going on. By example, I really want to get a press release about our recent Affordable Housing vote announced to the world, because it’s a good news story and I think FirstU can benefit from getting the word out. I also thought we could release it just before the Symposium, because I thought there was some synergy to be gained there. That timing didn’t work out. The press release will happen eventually, but not right now; it was too “everything everywhere all at once”.

Pardon me, my shoes are on the wrong feet.

Yours in faith,

~ Brent Nicolle, President
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“Just Get Over It” Workshop: An Unforgettable Experience

On April 12, I participated in a “Just Get Over It” zoom workshop about the historic relationship between Indigenous Peoples and settlers. I was curious about this workshop, organized by our Truth and ReconciliAction Group, because it was designed and led by the First Peoples House of Learning (FPHL) at Trent University, under the leadership of Dr. Dawn Harvard. I knew Dawn was a dynamic educator, activist and speaker, a Past President of the Ontario Native Women’s Association, and a board member of our affordable housing partner, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services.

I ended up having a head, heart and gut-impacting experience which I will not forget – *and which I hope many more congregants and campus partners will also have, if this workshop were to be offered again.*

Our 33 registrants came from FirstU Ottawa, the UU fellowships of Ottawa and Peterborough, Or’ Hanesmah, and Unitarian House. From the outset, Dawn and her two FPLC co-facilitators demonstrated that they were not there to shame and blame us but to help us understand the true history, which neither we nor they were taught, of the traumatic damage colonialism did to Indigenous

Peoples. Their goal was that we might let go of common misconceptions, stereotypes, and biases that many of us hold and become informed partners with Indigenous people for new ways forward.

Our facilitators immediately created a relaxed, interactive format. They put us into 10 breakout groups to help unfold the historic efforts by colonists to gain control of land and to “take the Indian out of the Indian”. Each group was given a different fact-based scenario from the first landing of the European explorers to today. For each scenario we asked ourselves “How would I feel if this were happening to me?”.

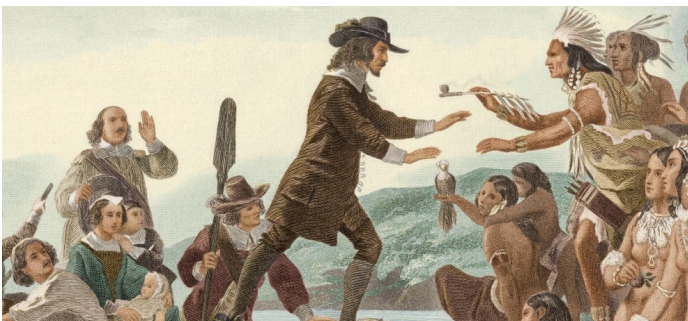
The plenary that followed was an engaging interplay between facilitators and participants. The facilitators connected and added to the scenarios by sharing additional narratives and some of their own and their family’s experiences; breakout groups read the scenarios and their feelings about them aloud. None of the feelings were good or even indifferent: for example, my group, which had a scenario about Indian Act regulations for reserve residents, said we would feel: “like we were in jail”, “without hope”, “helpless”,

“angry”, “worthless”, “unable to understand”, “betrayed”, and “treated inhumanely”.

At the end of the workshop, we were asked to name “ah ha” moments we had experienced. One of mine was that it took 50 years of judicial activism – led by Dawn Harvard’s mother – for Indigenous women who had lost their status by marrying non-Indigenous men to get it reinstated. However, my biggest “ah ha” moments were not the result of learning facts. Instead, they emerged from the format of the workshop: as we put ourselves into historic scenario after scenario, I felt a visceral sense not only of the pain caused by a given abusive event but by the chronic trauma resulting from the relentless accumulation of these genocidal abuses over centuries. My whole being, not just my mind, grasped two things. First, why Indigenous Peoples cannot “just get over it”. Second, as amazing as it is, not only were they never actually conquered but they are survivors and, more and more, leaders of change.

I recommend this workshop to all who want to be respectful partners with them!

~ submitted by Jane Lindsay



Contact and Colonization - World History II
bredbergworldhistory.weebly.com



The Scream. By Kent Monkman, 2017.

Renewal Task Force Update

We are near the midpoint of Renewal, time for a progress report. Our mandate is to encourage volunteering, do a spring fundraising campaign, and run our annual fall pledge drive.

Our existing core of volunteers is ageing, and too many are wearing several hats. Some of you have come forward, but more help is needed. Chuck Shields will be taking over the volunteer portfolio. Chuck will continue to encourage people to post volunteer positions, and engage in gentle matchmaking between volunteers and tasks. Michelle Jackson will continue to develop our new volunteer resource room.

We needed an extra fundraising drive this spring because, in these difficult times, we could not fit important items, patio railing replacement (Something Old) and an audio-visual and wi-fi upgrade (Something New) into the annual budget. In early May, this campaign is 25% to its target of \$70,000. It will continue into the early summer.

Find out how to donate by clicking on the red renewal button in the eUU or on the website. If in doubt, contact me, address below.

The purpose of the fall pledge campaign is to continue to “kindle the light within and inspire the courage to build a more just and compassionate world.” UUs have a strong history of making the world a better place, from the bravery of James Deeb, murdered in Selma, Alabama to the work of the Cappuccinos, who started Child Haven.

Here in Ottawa, we have erected our beautiful building, launched Unitarian House for seniors, and established the River Parkway Children’s Centre. Now, we are taking a major step in reconciliation by developing affordable housing with the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS).

Recently, we started the Ajashki project. This small venture to teach traditional gardening and agriculture to Indigenous youth has now grown into something much bigger, meshing with our Green Sanctuary

Accreditation initiative, and including education, social support, and food security. Ajashki is one of the major reasons why OAHS is comfortable working with us.

Our ongoing work supporting refugees has earned national respect. Most recently, we have stepped up to assist the many people who were made “refugees” by the tragic fire in Overbrook.

Our strong religious exploration program is a main reason why young families in search of meaning in their lives have come to us. Our RE program has come through a demographic trough, and is once again growing.

Rev Eric has now been installed and is fully engaged with the congregation. FirstU is reviving and revitalizing old activities and adding exciting new ones. We have a bright future ahead of us, and the Renewal Task Force thanks you for supporting FirstU. We are back.

~ submitted by Phil Nagy
renewal@firstunitarianottawa.ca



In Memoriam

Sherri Marie Watson ~ 27 March 2023 (b. April 3, 1944), wife of the late Robert W Fassold, survived by sister Gayle, sister-in-law Ruth Townsend, step-daughter Kim Knudsen and family

Helen Wells ~ 22 April 2023, survived by her son, Ryan Wells

Helen Elizabeth McCuaig ~ 30 April 2023 (b. Dec 21 1922) with cousin Karen Berrigan at her side; sister of Lois Walker (Bruce) and the late Norma Owen (David). Helen leaves behind several cousins and friends, including many in Unitarian House

News from the Social Justice Action Network (SJAN)

Mental Health Support and Action Group (MHSAG) News

Big News for Big Souls! Big Soul Project Sings for Ancoura

On **Saturday, June 24 at 7:30 pm**, **Centretown United Church** will resound with the joyous music of *Big Soul Project* and *Deep Groove Band*. This renowned community choir and its house band will put on a show with an irresistible beat to entertain young, old, and everyone in between. The occasion is a **fundraiser for Ancoura**, which provides safe, stable, and supportive housing for Ottawa residents with mental illness.

You can watch for updates on both organizations' websites:

www.ancoura.ca and www.bigsoulproject.com, as well as on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

FirstU and your MHSAG have been keystone supporters of Ancoura's mission since its founding. The June 24th concert and your purchase of tickets will be a great way for our congregation to continue our support.

Ancoura is an acronym signifying:

- an *anchor* – offering stability in stable, long-term housing embraced by a vibrant community of supports;
- *heart* – (*coeur*) embracing caring, warmth, love and friendship;
- *courage* – believing in the potential for individual growth; and
- *encouragement* – offering this to one another within a supportive community.

Ancoura also signifies a unison of voices – many individuals coming together as one community which is the essence of a choir or chorus (*chœur*). And what better exaltation

of this essence than Big Soul Project's concert in support of Ancoura!

The MHSAG meets on the last Sunday of each month after the worship service. Folks living with mental health challenges and/or caregivers are invited to join us to share their experiences, by offering and receiving mutual support, and we invite you to participate in our advocacy work. Friends and family are very welcome to attend. You can reach us at:

mhsag@firstunitarianottawa.ca

~ submitted by johnnie gall



Environmental Action Working Group (EAWG)

“What’s Growing On” at Ajashki

On April 18, Earth Speaks was treated to an engaging presentation by Kayoki Whiteduck, Lead Educator of the Ajashki Food Security and Climate Change Learning Centre here at FirstU.

Ajashki means “soil” in Algonquin. The Ajashki program is an Indigenous-led reconciliation project that embraces Indigenous knowledge and culture to help Indigenous youth develop skills for employment and life in a changing world. You’ll see Ajashki across the FirstU campus, with the grow towers in the Grow Room adjacent to Fellowship Hall, the food garden beside the building, and the Learning Centre in Room 6 downstairs.

In his presentation, Kayoki provided an update on Ajashki’s programming, future activities, and accomplishments. Throughout the winter, the Future Food Warriors (FFWs) have been busy with grow tower maintenance, learning about food security and climate change, and art workshops. The FFWs created art pieces based on social justice themes that will soon be showcased for the congregation – stay tuned!



Ajashki is now transitioning to summer programming, moving outside to the garden. In addition to planting, watering, harvesting, and protecting the plants from squirrels and other critters, the FFWs will prepare food donations for the Parkdale Food Centre, participate in plant identification walks, and take a field trip to Kayoki’s farm.

The group will also begin two new projects. First, an Indigenous mural will be installed next to the Ajashki garden. The mural is being designed by an Indigenous artist together with the FFWs and will be painted by them. Also, in collaboration with the SJAN, Ajashki is in the early stages of planning for a food cupboard to support FFWs, congregation members, and community members facing food insecurity.

Finally, Kayoki shared Ajashki’s recent accomplishments. First on the (long) list is Ajashki’s pride in collaborative relationships with other

FirstU groups. 'Friendly agreements' have been signed with the EAG, Religious Exploration Program, Friends of the Meditation Garden, Or Haneshamah, and Justice Equity Action Group, with more in development. These agreements show how FirstU is transforming from a charity model (giving money) to an action-based model.



Other highlights include an [article](#) in the National Observer last fall and receiving the Greener Greenspace Certificate. More recently, Ecology Ottawa awarded Ajashki the inaugural "Climate Champion Award". This award recognizes that Ajashki is a local organization that inspires others to take action on climate, teaches about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and helps FFWs adapt to the changing climate.

Ajashki is funded by the Indigenous Peoples' Resilience Fund, the Ottawa Community Foundation, Nature Canada, Crime Prevention Ottawa, the Social Justice Action Network at FirstU, and personal donations. Thank you to all who have given money, supplies, and time to this terrific program.

See the Ajashki page for news or if you would like to help us out financially:

www.firstunitarianottawa.ca/ajashki-garden-project.html

~ Submitted by Jennifer Balcom, Member, Ajashki Circle of Support

Earth Day 2023 in Montreal

In early March, the Environmental Action Group (EAG) learned there was to be a mega Earth Day climate demonstration in Montreal. Eight provincial environmental groups were organizing to attract demonstrators from across Quebec to Montreal and Quebec City. There was a school bus leaving Gatineau early Saturday morning making a multi-stop trip to the demo. We decided that rather than a long, slow bus ride to Montreal we would meet up at the Tremblay Road Via Station and catch the 10:15 Train. Several FirstU people tried to attend but ultimately only Sam Babaci and I made the trip. What we didn't have in numbers, we made up for in spirit!

Traveling to a public demonstration in a visibly sustainable way, such as public transit, is a good idea because it influences people both during the trip and at the event. Train travel allowed some chatter with Via personnel about what we were up to and a few people seeing our signs stated their support for us.

Once in Montreal we had a short subway ride and a longish walk to the start of the demo at the Georges Etienne Cartier monument on the East side of Mont Royal. The walk to the monument took us through a park where the April ice storm had ravaged the trees. It was a poignant reminder of the existential threat about which we had shown up to protest. Any climate denier present would have needed their cognitive dissonance in overdrive with all the damage on display.

The demonstration headed up Avenue du Parc shortly after we arrived. My opinion that Quebecers can show the

rest of the country how to demonstrate was reinforced. It was a large and spirited crowd, about 7,000 strong. The organizers had a great set-up with a mobile sound system boasting lots of wattage. Along the march route people had supportive banners on their balconies, and passers-by were encouraged to join the protesters.

Such a large well-organized demonstration naturally attracts media. About a kilometre North on Avenue du Parc I spotted what looked like two reporters having a serious tête-à-tête with Sam. The interview lasted for quite a while, but Sam seemed to be holding his own. Afterwards Sam felt the journalists were maybe not very pro-environment. The reporters didn't say who they were working for but afterwards Sam and I saw our pictures in a CTV story which seemed balanced:

<https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/thousands-of-protesters-urge-governments-to-act-on-earth-day-1.6367508>

It is always difficult to know how effective demonstrating is; but it's always safe to say it is more effective than doing nothing. Earth Day in Montreal may become an annual pilgrimage.

~ submitted by Mike Fletcher



Sam with Reporter

FirstU and Ottawa Fellowship host Canadian Unitarian Council events May 19-23

We did it! We successfully hosted, with the Ottawa Fellowship, the Canadian Unitarian Council's (CUC) Annual General Meeting, Symposium, CanUdle youth conference, and Our Whole Lives facilitator training over the May long weekend. People came from across Canada, and a few beyond, for a stimulating thought-provoking program on the theme of "Living into the 8th Principle". And many from our congregation worked as volunteers and participated in various events, sometimes in leadership roles. The Host Team thanks all of you!

The CUC's AGM mostly went smoothly, but there was one major exception, which was agreeing on the strategic priorities related to the 8th Principle for the coming year, in particular which, if any, marginalized groups should be prioritized. The decision was to postpone this motion indefinitely, for the CUC Board and staff to reconsider. The CUC has the same challenges as many of its member congregations, specifically declining membership numbers and having to draw down investments to balance the budget.

Several of the public events were recorded and will be available to view any time on the CUC's YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/@canadianunitariancouncil5126>

The National Worship Service on Sunday, May 21 is already available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVFZPNSykTo>. Rev. Eric Meter was one of the speakers.

Also very worthy of viewing when available are:

- The Confluence Lecture, "Open Minds/Closed Doors" by Rev. Julie Stoneberg. It was about change, fear and loss associated with change, and the gaps between our aspiration to be "radically inclusive" and the reality. Rev. Stoneberg paused at various points to show thought provoking quotes with musical accompaniment.
- The Keynote Address by Algonquin Elder and Ottawa's English language poet laureate, Albert Dumont. He spoke about the importance of storytelling in Indigenous culture and gave an excellent demonstration of his prowess at it. The stories he shared with us included parts of his

own life story and a traditional story about carrying a rock to make amends. He emphasized the importance of all peoples in what we know as Canada working together for a better future.

Other elements of the Symposium included: food; music; an opening ceremony including a banner parade and words of welcome from City of Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe; four Saturday workshops related to the theme of "Living into the 8th Principle"; multiple sightings of "Uni" the unicorn, multi-generational activities, exhibits, some social events, and lots of good networking and fellowship. The CUC AGM, all of the public events, and the workshops included online participants in addition to the people participating in-person at Algonquin College. The Saturday evening "Open Mic" social event included lots of FirstU talent. Even Vanna White was there.

Informal feedback indicates that many people were very happy to be gathering in-person again and found it a good and meaningful experience.

~ Submitted by Maury Prevost,
Symposium Host Team Lead



Spring in the Gardens

Early May and the signs of resurgent life abound in the gardens; violets, daffodils and magnolia blossoms are already in full bloom. Against this backdrop of new beginnings in the cycle of life our recognition of May 5th Red Dress Day with the spectacle of empty dresses hanging from tree limbs is particularly poignant. This is the second year that the Friends of the Meditation Gardens have organized the display to help maintain awareness of the issue of racial and gender-based violence. The ReDress Project, initially conceived by Métis artist Jaime Black, exhibited red dresses to symbolize missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, to evoke a presence by marking absence, calling to the spirits that they are taken but not forgotten.



Photo credit: Ellen Kammermayer

Our FirstU Truth and ReconciliAction Group organized and facilitated a sharing circle in the gardens following the Sunday service. Smoldering sage was offered for smudging before participants were invited to express their thoughts and feelings surrounding violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit persons. The names of such victims from listings in the Ottawa area were read aloud and remembered by the circle. Thank you to everyone who donated a dress for display - they will be stored for next year's remembrance.

On the wish list of projects the Friends group sought to undertake in the 2023 gardening season was repair to Brian's Reste. This is the cedar arbor built to honour our longest serving minister, the Rev. Brian Kopke, who served the FirstU community from 1985 to 2007. Wood rot had been detected on the arbor seating and when we made a request to the Property Committee for repair advice, Ron Doyle, the Chair, took immediate action. He dismantled the damaged seating and at his home used his carpentry talent to construct an exact replica. Thank you, Ron, for your timely intervention so that, should there

be a memorial service for Rev. Kopke later this year, Brian's Reste will be flawless. The Virginia Creeper that grows over the arbor sometimes obscures the entrance plaque – it reads:

*Here may you find peace,
freedom from disquiet, and
relaxation.
Take time, seek relief and find
tranquility.
So sit here a while, breathe and
reflect.*

~ submitted by Susan Mellor on behalf of Friends of the Meditation Gardens



Ron Doyle & David Hudson
Photo credit: Margaret Linton

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: **Aug 15, 2023**.



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