



# South Fraser Unitarians



*What does it mean to be a  
Community Engaged in Radical Hospitality  
and Racial Justice?*

SFUC Thematic Packet  
February 2018

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## A Note from the Minister

This month's theme packet is drawn mainly from the Canadian Unitarian Council's *Sharing Our Faith* packet, as well as the Soul Matters material on the theme of hospitality, as well as additional research that both Daylene Marshall and I have done. *Sharing Our Faith* is a program of the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC), and it encourages greater associational awareness in our congregations, the fostering of relationships, and a sense of community and connection among and between our member congregations and communities.

Each year, the CUC encourages all congregations to hold a *Sharing Our Faith* service, and to take up a special collection. The collection is administered by the CUC and given directly back in the form of grants to congregations applying for projects they may otherwise not afford to undertake, and which enhance ministry, growth and/or outreach for that congregation and for the Unitarian and Universalist movement. I encourage you to give generously to the CUC on February 18<sup>th</sup>, or submit your donation directly to the CUC, 215 Spadina Ave #400, Toronto, ON M5T 2C7, with Sharing Our Faith in the memo line.

This year's Sharing Our Faith package focuses on "**Radical Hospitality & Racial Justice**". A new vision for Canadian Unitarian Universalism was affirmed at the CUC Annual General Meeting in May 2016. **As Canadian Unitarian Universalists: seven** principles guide our choices, **six** sources nourish our spirits, and **five** aspirations help us grow. Our second aspiration calls us to be:

***Radically Inclusive – We strive to create hospitable, diverse, multi-generational communities.***

The past year has brought new awareness to our movement. We have been woken up and are asked to pay attention to those on the margins, and those struggling for racial justice. In Canada we may not experience the after effects of slavery like our neighbours to the south, yet we too have been challenged to look at our own complicity and cooperation in the systems that oppress First Nations people, immigrants, and people of colour. The question has been asked to each of us, and now the tide is turning towards '*Radical Hospitality and Racial Justice.*'

What would practicing *Radical Hospitality* look like in your congregation? How can we support and promote *Racial Justice*? Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist congregations have long practiced tolerance; it is part of our tradition. May we have the courage to look at next steps to bring us closer to acceptance, love, and '*Radical Hospitality and Racial Justice.*'

The Sharing Our Faith package was created by the Rev. Anne Barker, minister at Westwood Unitarian in Edmonton, and Rosemary Morrison, intern minister serving the Kelowna Unitarians. It is supported by material from Canadian UU ministers and individual Unitarians.

This package is offered for use by congregations as they plan their Sharing Our Faith services. It is the hope that as congregations create their worship service, they will remember others are using the same resource package and that the connections and relationships between congregations and communities will be strengthened.

Where a Canadian Unitarian Council maple leaf chalice symbol is displayed after the name of a writer, it indicates that they are a Canadian or have served a Canadian congregation as their minister.



If you have any questions about this package, the program, or would like to apply for a Sharing Our Faith grant, please contact us at [sharing-our-faith@cuc.ca](mailto:sharing-our-faith@cuc.ca).

Sign up for small group discussion circles – stay tuned to the Chalice Lighter for ways to sign up – and come prepared to talk about your experience engaging in one of the spiritual practices listed in this packet.

## **Spiritual Practice – Radical Hospitality and Racial Justice**

*Please choose one of the following spiritual practices to engage in and be prepared to discuss your experience at your theme small group ministry circle.*

### **Option A – Which of Your “Keep Out!” Signs Need to Come Down?**

As our community begins to settle into our new abode, we are provided with an opportunity to wrestle with what is currently on the “outside” of our lives but needs to be welcomed in. Where have we put up a “Keep Out!” sign that needs to come down? What have we been avoiding or holding at bay that now needs attention? Or care? Or confrontation? Maybe your “Keep Out” sign isn’t about avoidance, but difference; maybe your task is to invite “otherness” or “the stranger” into your life? Maybe it’s not a big thing; maybe what you need to welcome in is not some deep existential quest, but something simpler, some small thing of beauty or rest or fun—a small thing that is not really small at all.

The assumption of this exercise is that—even if this is more emotionally challenging than we expected—we all will experience this letting in as grace, as bringing us a gift we maybe didn’t expect, earn or even deserve. So your mission, if you are willing to accept it, is:

Identify a symbol of that gift and bring it with you to your meeting.

This will be your chance to share the story of your homework in more depth. But also to witness to the gift that comes when we dare to live “hospitable lives.” If you have identified the “Keep Out” sign that needs to come down, but have not yet made your way to actually taking it down, that’s perfectly fine. Some things take more than a month! Nevertheless, still bring a symbol, just make it a symbol of the grace/gift you hope to encounter once you’ve welcomed in what you need to.

All in all, a perfect way to reflect on our Canadian Unitarian Council's vision statement — reaffirming the many ways this faith and our fellow UU travelers remind us that life is full of grace and that it is safe to open ourselves, even when it's not easy.

## **Option B – Deconstructing Racism**

This spiritual practice invites us to reflect on our Principles and how they call to us to deconstruct racism. Many Unitarian Universalists look to our principles for guidance on how to live our lives. The first part of this spiritual practice invites you to create some time where you'll be undisturbed and light your chalice. Use the time to reflect on the Expression of Reconciliation offered by the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC) and the Unitarian Universalist Ministers of Canada (UUMOC) found here: <http://cuc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/CUC-Expression-of-Reconciliation-Adapted-For-Congregations.pdf>

As you are reflecting on the principles and how they were transgressed, choose one Principle that speaks to you, calls to you, stands out, or that you want to wrestle with.

The second part of the practice invites you to demonstrate how this Principle calls you to do anti-racism work and create beloved community. You may choose to do visual art, songs, drama or any art form you choose.

Come to your small group prepared to share your presentation.

## **Option C – The Black Hole**

**Historical & Future Trajectories of Black Lives Matter & Unitarian Universalists**,  
*Minns Lecture Series, Spring 2017: Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed*

Source: <https://vimeopro.com/user9111141/spring2017minns/video/214295186>

“For its spring 2017 series, the Minns Lectures Committee brought together a group of leading and insurgent Unitarian Universalist historians, ethicists, and activists to consider these questions, among others: Who were the African American leaders in Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist congregations? Why don't Unitarian Universalists today know about our black antecedents? What is the relationship between this “black hole” in white consciousness about African Americans and the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement?” Investigate the many opportunities to engage in learning about black history here in the Metro Vancouver mainland by attending one of the many events.

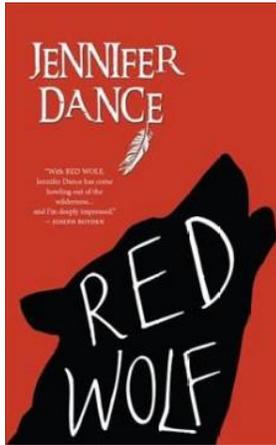
Come to the small group ready to talk about your exploration of the “black hole” here in Canada as we embark on Black History month.

## Questions To Live With

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply find **the one** that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. And then come to the thematic small group meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.

1. What were you taught about "hospitality" growing up? What did "being open" mean to your family of origin? What did it mean to you when you were younger? It likely meant a lot of things, so think about what the primary meaning was. The understanding that most strongly influenced the behavior of you and those close to you. Did it mean being courageous? Open to new ideas? Accepting of those who were different than you? Was it a healthy way to understand it? Did your family's definition of "welcoming" have a shadow side? Looking back do you wish they had embodied it differently? That you had embodied it differently? And don't forget to lift up the good side. What was meaningful and important about the way they embodied hospitality? And do you honor that and continue to live that out in your own life now as well as you'd like?
2. When has engagement with our faith community taught you something new about what it means to be a "person of hospitality?" When has it challenged you to embody "hospitality" or "openness" or "welcoming" in a more meaningful or needed way? We're not just talking about sermons or classes here. Relationships, watching our fellow church members, hearing stories about others living out their faith often provide the most powerful lessons and stimulate the most life-changing choices. This is your chance to think back, notice how this community has made a difference in your life and even, by lifting up the story, say thanks!
3. *What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.*

## For Families of All Ages and Sizes



### Youth Books of the Month:

#### **Red Wolf by Jennifer Dance**

This novel tells the story of Red Wolf, a young First Nations boy forced to move into a residential school and assume a new identity. Paralleling his story is that of Crooked Ear, an orphaned wolf pup he has befriended. Both must learn to survive in the white man's world.

**Discussion Questions:** What does reconciliation mean to you? How do you see yourself, your family, or community in relation to these issues? What types of situations, reparations, actions, gestures of reconciliation do you think should occur?

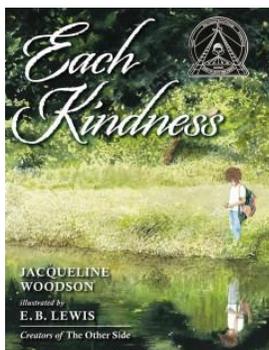


#### **The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas**

"Sixteen-year-old Starr Carter moves between two worlds: the poor neighborhood where she lives and the fancy suburban prep school she attends. The uneasy balance between these worlds is shattered when Starr witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend Khalil at the hands of a police officer.

**Discussion Questions:** Why is the Black Lives Matter movement important? Do you think it is relevant for Canadians as well? Is there similar injustice in Canada? What can we do to work towards racial justice in our community?

### Children's Book of the Month:



#### **Each Kindness by Jacqueline Woodson**

When a new girl comes to school, the other children don't want to play with her. This book teaches a lesson of how kindness and inclusion are important, but also that if we aren't mindful of this sometimes we miss the opportunity to make a difference in another person's life.

**Discussion Questions:** If you could rewrite this story, what would you change? How can we be welcoming to new people in our school, church or community?

## Family Activity Ideas

- Create welcome cards for new students that come to your class at school or church
- Invite a guest over for dinner or a play date that you would not normally think to ask
- Visit the Museum of Anthropology
- Visit A FROG (Aboriginal Family Resources On the Go) Bus - [http://www.tsawwassenfirstnation.com/pdfs/TFN-Program-Services/Education-Services/TFN\\_AFROG\\_Information\\_04.14.11.pdf](http://www.tsawwassenfirstnation.com/pdfs/TFN-Program-Services/Education-Services/TFN_AFROG_Information_04.14.11.pdf)

### *For increasing our knowledge of other cultures...*

**“I Am Not a Number”**, Jenny Kay Dupuis (author), Kathy Kacer (author) & Gillian Newland (illustrator) - “When Irene is removed from her First Nations family to live in a residential school, she is confused, frightened and terribly homesick. She tries to remember who she is and where she came from despite being told to do otherwise. When she goes home for summer holidays, her parents decide never to send her away again, but where will she hide and what will happen when her parents disobey the law?”

**“The Sharing Circle: Stories about First Nations Culture”**, Theresa Meuse (author) & Arthur Stevens (illustrator) - “Sharing Circle includes seven children's stories about First Nations culture and spirituality practices. All seven stories, The Eagle Feather, The Dream Catcher, The Sacred Herbs, The Talking Circle, The Medicine Wheel, The Drum, and The Medicine Pouch explore First Nations cultural practices and teach children about Mi'kmaq beliefs and heritage. Researched and written by Mi'kmaw children's author Theresa Meuse and beautifully illustrated by Mi'kmaw illustrator Arthur Stevens, this book will engage and inform children of all ages.”

**“Jingle Dancer”**, Cynthia Leitich Smith (author) & Cornelius Van Wright (illustrator) - “The affirming story of how a contemporary Native American girl turns to her family and community to help her dance find a voice.”

### **For a light-hearted approach to Radical Hospitality...**

**“Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed”**, Mo Willems (author & illustrator) - “Wilbur is different from the other Naked Mole Rats in his Colony, because he wears clothes (and he likes it!). But what will happen when Grandpah, the oldest, wisest, and most naked Naked Mole Rat ever discovers Wilbur's secret? Funnyman and three-time Caldecott Honoree Mo Willems exposes the naked truth about being yourself and wearing it well.”

## Readings About Radical Hospitality and Racial Justice

### Singing the Living Tradition Reading No. 584

#### A Network of Mutuality

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

There are some things in our social system to which all of us ought to be maladjusted.

Hatred and bitterness can never cure the disease of fear, only love can do that.

We must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation.

The foundation of such a method is love.

Before it is too late, we must narrow the gaping chasm between our proclamations of peace and our lowly deeds which precipitate and perpetuate war.

One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek but a means by which we arrive at that goal.

We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means.

We shall hew out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.

*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

#### **A Poem for Democracy, Rev. Audrey Brooks, Unitarian Chaplain, Unitarian Church of Edmonton**



When humans left the wild places  
that demanded cooperation or death  
they thought they left a brutal world  
for one of safety and progress

Let it not be said that this is not true  
for the most part as anyone can see  
We have made ourselves the good life  
those of us with opportunity and skill

It is those who come into the world  
at the bottom end of things, the poor  
neglected, tired, hungry and abused  
that charity reaches to ameliorate

Our duty is to create inclusion  
to build societies that encourage  
nurture, educate, and equalize  
rights, prosperity and justice

Our faith is based on democracy  
the freedom to believe, to grow  
to be welcome at the voting places  
to have a say about our governance

We come together with regularity  
to celebrate and promote these values,  
So that all seekers after truth  
find it here and in the world

Democracy is a work in progress.  
We know we must be ever vigilant  
against principalities and powers  
that would see its very death

We are the voices and the actions:  
On our shoulders rest duties  
that will take us a long time to do,  
But we will get there, We know we will.

**We Are Not Guests**, *Rev. Alicia Forde, adapted for the Canadian context with her permission, by folks at the Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough*

Am I a guest here. Here in this House. Are you?

Are we guests here. Here in this House. And, whose House do we inhabit?

In the small world of our lives the borders between us: easements, fences, gates, hedges—  
serve to delineate, to separate us.

To remind us of where my property begins and ends.

Where your property begins and ends.

If you cross over: you are a trespasser or a guest in my house.

You've worked to own this small plot of land and the house erected on it.

You've claimed it. It is now part of yourself. Your definition of self. Your identity.

If I cross over your fences: I am a trespasser or a guest in your house.

What does it mean then, that Canadian settlers moved into British Columbia and took over almost all that province and its resources, without any treaty being signed?

Or that, with treaties signed in Ontario and other parts of this country, Canada has not kept its agreements?

Was Canada trespasser? Guest?

Are there to be no consequences for taking what does not belong to you?

Should we simply forget whose House we inhabit?

The actions of the past have led us, step by step, into this current predicament.

A predicament in which we perceive that the land, the resources that are a part of this House, are ours, and we, who now live here, are being virtuous in our willingness to share it with the original peoples.

This perception erases the history, and would have us believe that the mining resources newly discovered in the “Ring of Fire” in northern Ontario belong to the mining companies alone...that those companies need only share in this wealth if Indigenous People living on that land can prove that they can contribute to the faster or more efficient extraction of that wealth.

This is, for the Indigenous peoples, a matter of survival.

It is, for Canada, a matter of keeping our treaties, and of de-colonizing our culture.

The prospect of de-colonization is scary. The notion of reconciliation is overwhelming.

Where do we begin?

With First Peoples?

With territories?

With ourselves?

How do we acknowledge and address the complexities of our past, present, and—if we’re not conscious—future of dominance?

What would right relationship look like?

What conditions and considerations would make reconciliation possible?

And. For us—Unitarian Universalists—what would it mean for us to shake off the structures of colonization and delve into the reality of reconciliation, of restoring friendship and harmony.

Whose House do we inhabit?

For we are not hosts. We are not owners.

Nor are we guests.

What, then, is our responsibility?

**We Answer the Call of Love, Julia Corbett-Hemeyer, UUA WorshipWeb**

In the face of hate,  
*We answer the call of love.*

In the face of exclusion,  
*We answer the call of inclusion.*

In the face of homophobia,  
*We answer the call of LGBTQ rights.*

In the face of racism,  
*We answer the call of justice for all races.*

In the face of xenophobia,  
*We answer the call of pluralism.*

In the face of misogyny,  
*We answer the call of women's rights.*

In the face of demagoguery,  
*We answer the call of reason.*

In the face of religious intolerance,  
*We answer the call of diversity.*

In the face of narrow nationalism,  
*We answer the call of global community.*

In the face of bigotry,  
*We answer the call of open-mindedness.*

In the face of despair,  
*We answer the call of hope.*

As Unitarian Universalists, we answer the call of love —  
*now more than ever.*

**Responsive Reading**, Rev. Debra Faulk, Unitarian Congregation of Calgary  
Source: CUC Vision Statement



**All:** As Canadian Unitarian Universalists, we envision a world in which our interdependence calls us to love and justice.

**West:** As Canadian Unitarian Universalists: Seven principles guide our choices, Six sources nourish our spirits, Five aspirations help us grow.

**East:** We aspire to be: **Deeply Connected** We strive to foster healthy relationships amongst and within UU communities, with the broader world and with all life.

**West: Radically Inclusive** We strive to create hospitable, diverse, multi-generational communities.

**East: Actively Engaged** We strive to work joyfully for a just and compassionate society, experimenting with new forms of community.

**West: Theologically Alive** We seek to be ever-evolving in our understanding, open to new knowledge.

**East: Spiritually Grounded** We seek transformation through personal spiritual experiences and shared ritual

**All:** Holding this in common we come together, committed to the growth, sustainability and nurture of this our liberal faith

**the locked medicine chest**, Liz James, [LizJamesWrites.com](http://LizJamesWrites.com)



sent home after an operation, she spent days just  
enduring  
the pain settling in the spaces between her ribs  
corralling her breath into tight spaces until her voice was  
windless

she became settled land  
pressed against the bed  
like ironed white sheets

by the time she is brought into the ER  
she has been made loud  
clothed in wires and tubes and flashing red and blue lights

they wonder why she waited so long  
and tell her that now she is infested with  
complications

this time it is in a hospital  
but it could just as easily be a courtroom  
or a school

this time it is medicine  
this time it is my husband  
who comes home,  
carrying the despair and fury of defeat  
crouched tensely  
on the back of his neck

my first thought is how i would have spoken up  
in her shoes  
i would have known that the world should not be as  
painful  
as that

"that's what i thought, too"  
he answers me  
"the first time"

he points out how i was taught speech  
in ways that go beyond words  
each ritual of medicine fits around my culture  
with the unnoticeable protection  
of a surgeon's glove

i think about how her blood has generations of practice in  
being told it does not fit  
being seen as a complication

where i have been groomed into assertiveness  
she has become practiced in  
endurance

i don't pretend to understand all the reasons that she didn't speak up  
or at least  
didn't speak up in a way that they could hear her  
she is mottled with history and culture and callouses  
and the camouflage has become  
so thick  
that to some eyes she is no more than  
landscape

in the wee hours of the morning he is looking over the papers  
temperature, respiratory rate, bloodwork

i do not understand how there could be so much information  
and yet  
so much of her still left  
uncharted  
the chart will not tell him  
about the time the school nurse punished her for getting sick  
when she was eight  
or how often her family doctor interrupts her when she speaks  
about the way the woods hold her up

or about the way sleep is so different  
the night after a sweat

he will not find the map he is looking for  
in those thin white pages  
because when the textbooks said  
"patient history"  
they meant something else

something that has nothing to do with being patient  
or with knowing our history

i am nostalgic for the days when it was my fault  
for being white  
when my mind moved in choreographed patterns around certain thoughts  
and the sandpapering grate of guilt was something i just  
lived with

even now, there are days when my every footstep on this land  
cringes under the weight of our mutual history  
and the question of whether i am a villain or a hero  
drowns out everything  
and everyone  
else

it is easier to apologize  
than it is to listen

summers up at lac la ronge  
the brown skinned little boy pointed to the bushes saying  
"right there--right in front of us! how come you can't see it?"  
finally,  
when i insisted he was lying, he tossed a pebble at the rabbit  
so it would move

i was sad later  
wondering if he hurt it  
just so it would become visible to me

i wished i knew how to fix white eyes, back then  
as sure as now, i wish i could dilate my mind so i could  
perceive certain  
subtle things

complexities  
mistaken for no more than  
complications

you don't fix white eyes  
not completely

you don't live your live apologizing for having white eyes, either  
there are times for apologizing, and there are times for  
asking for help

times for flying like geese  
with a common direction but each with a different role  
with the land spread out, soft and wise, below our wings

wind in our faces  
headed home

## Videos and Podcasts

### **This Too is Us: The Truth About Racial Violence in Canada**

For many Canadians, especially white Canadians, the events that have unfolded in Charlottesville strike a deep chord of condemnation. For the most part, Canadians immediately denounce the efforts of white supremacists and Nazis. Most Canadians would agree that there is only one side to be on, the side that rejects this form of racist violence and hatred. Many Canadians would also assume that this is a uniquely American problem. This is false.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/jeffrey-ansloos/this-is-us-too-the-truth-about-racial-violence-in-canada a 23078560/](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/jeffrey-ansloos/this-is-us-too-the-truth-about-racial-violence-in-canada-a-23078560/)

### **The Fragile Art of Hospitality**

Rev. Katie Kandarian-Morris' sermon on The Fragile Art of Hospitality. It's pretty easy to make ourselves welcome here. A little harder when thinking about how to make someone else feel that way. How might we continue to open our hearts to live into the mission of our faith?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tn5Z-CD0q34>

## Embrace Radical Hospitality

Grace Rodriguez at TEDxSantoDomingo talks about the importance of embracing radical hospitality. She asks, "How do you see yourself when you are accepted as you are? When you look at someone you don't know do you see a 'what' or do you see a 'who'? Do you see an ally, or do you see a threat?"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HqRurvnNrc>

## Food for Thought

### “Radical Hospitality”, Rev. Anne Barker, Westwood Unitarian, Edmonton

My first week of Unitarian Universalist seminary in Chicago, my in-coming classmates and I sat in a circle with some of the staff and faculty, and had a sort of ‘getting to know you better’ check-in. “Where do you come from – theologically?” was part of the introduction. “What are your primary influences?”

One of the people in my class described them self as a theist – someone with an essential belief in God. Without hesitation, a faculty member responded *‘don’t worry – we’ll fix that before your time here is done.’*

Ten years later, my friend joined that same Unitarian Universalist seminary, and sat in that same kind of a circle, where one of the people in her class described them self as an atheist – someone who doesn’t believe in God.

The immediate faculty response was *‘don’t worry – we’ll fix that before your time here is done.’*

Today we will reflect on ‘making invitations’ ... and about ‘effecting change’ ...  
About whose work it is to be doing the changing ...  
And about who is willing to change their selves ....

Today, we are talking about *Radical Hospitality*. Regular hospitality is when people generously receive and welcome visitors, or guests, in a kind and friendly manner. We might feed them, entertain them, or host them overnight, but at the very core, we are ‘making a place for someone’ ... we are welcoming people in.

So *Radical Hospitality* has to be more than this – more than regular hospitality. For it to be *Radical*, it needs to be beyond the ordinary – go further – be revolutionary even.

At Westwood Unitarian in Edmonton, our Purpose Statement takes an ambitious approach to hospitality:

Westwood: A compassionate community of free religious thought,

INVITING ALL PEOPLE to rest, grow & serve the world.

It doesn't differentiate. We mean ALL PEOPLE.

The invitation, at its essence, is sincerely designed to be inclusive. It doesn't require people to come to our building – doesn't require people to be just like us, or just like anything, to participate – doesn't insist that if people do come, that they stay.

But if they do want to come, to be with us – to be welcomed into the Westwood community of Unitarian Universalism – then we need to be ready to welcome them in: prepared in our hearts, prepared in our minds, prepared in our willingness and, probably, be prepared to change.

When we designed our Purpose Statement, that is exactly the conversation we were having. What does it mean to be Unitarian Universalists, UU's, and specifically UU's of the Westwood variety? We talked about what it means to be inclusive and welcoming – hospitable, making space for people – and, on the whole, we're pretty good at it. *Radical Hospitality*, however, asks more of us. It asks us to be willing to change.

There is plenty of historical evidence that UU's are able to embrace change. While our historical roots are in Christianity, we have shifted and grown over time to embrace more perspectives. From a group that followed Biblical Principles, to a denomination that now embraces 7 UU Principles, we model a willingness to be non-creedal, not requiring allegiance to any specific religious text. A combination of democracy and creativity has crafted these Principles and an appreciation for both emerging wisdom and changing perspectives is what keeps them a living document. The 7<sup>th</sup> Principle, for example, was added later than the others – in response to the increase in earth centered and environmental perspectives.

With deep roots in Christianity, UU's experienced a surge in small congregations during the 40s, 50s & 60s – a time we call the fellowship movement – where many new, smaller groups emerged. With a significant atheist and agnostic presence, these groups were lay-led by local people using a shared ministry model.

Theologically, we have gone from Christian ... to welcoming those who doubted Christianity ... and now evolving into a more pluralistic model. Whether people bring diverse perspectives into UU communities, or change after joining – perspectives like earth-centered, Buddhist, Humanist, atheist, agnostic and Christian now co-exist under the sympathetic umbrella of the UU Principles.

In addition to these philosophical shifts, Unitarians have also undertaken programming to explore and address social and political concerns: Welcoming Congregation – to help us reach out to the LGBTQ population; Green Sanctuary – to live our commitments to environmental responsibility within our buildings; and OWL: Our Whole Lives – comprehensive sexuality programming to increase the health, well-being & inclusiveness of our populations. Most recently, Canadian Unitarians and Universalists have been growing our understanding of and commitment to healthy relationships between Indigenous and

Non-indigenous peoples, with the Truth, Healing & Reconciliation Reflection Guides. Where we see inadequacy or injustice, we work to answer the call – even if it means examining ourselves and our practices. All these aim towards a readiness for *Radical Hospitality*.

Let's take another try at a definition. Here is what some Christian churches have to say about *Radical Hospitality*:

*In Christianity, Radical Hospitality involves a focus on “inviting, welcoming, including, supporting and helping newcomers as they grow in faith and become a part of [the] body of Christ.”* ([www.pen-del.org/files/fileslibrary/radical\\_hospitality.doc](http://www.pen-del.org/files/fileslibrary/radical_hospitality.doc))

In other words, welcoming in people who are ‘not yet like us’ and bringing them into the family of Christianity. There is a mandate – a biblical imperative – asking this of Christians. They call it ‘the great commission’.

Vicki Carmichael, a Presbyterian Minister of Music & Choir Director, says this:

*Radical hospitality means vulnerability. I have to change what is comfortable or simply familiar for me in order to provide what is best for others. I have to step out of my comfort zone, my safety zone, into the disturbing place beyond, where I am awkward, afraid, and unsure, and where I am in a position to make mistakes or even to fail. However, as a friend reminds me, this is also “where the magic happens.”* (<http://covnetpres.org/2012/06/radical-hospitality/>)

Have you ever gone to somewhere where you felt like you were not welcome? There are typically two kinds of reasons for this:

- Conflict in beliefs regarding what is true, acceptable or important:
  - you feel excluded or offended by their beliefs
  - they exclude you, or are offended by your beliefs

Being gay is often a good example here – where the people are using homophobic slurs, so you feel offended – or perhaps you want to go to church with your family, but you tell them you don't believe in God, and you find yourself no longer welcome.

- Or there might simply be failures in hospitality:
  - You feel excluded or uncomfortable for a reason other than core beliefs
    - Temperature, style, manner
    - Culture, class or familiarity with practices
    - Lack of accessibility, or comfortable seating ...

... things that make a difference, but aren't necessarily big philosophical problems.

The first is likely a deal breaker. The second is something we can do something about.

This distinction is about the difference between what we believe, and how we interact in the world. Hospitality is about welcome, friendliness and inclusion – how gracious we are

with one another. *Radical Hospitality* is about how we order our priorities – how far we are willing to go to transform lives – our own included.

Christians are commanded by Jesus to engage in *Radical Hospitality*. Jesus insisted that his message was for all people. He insisted that the Jews include and care for everyone – the poor, the sick, the socially unacceptable. He told his followers to invite people in to their banquets, without an expectation of repayment – that their repayment was righteousness ... being in alignment with moral law.

The Great Commission was to bring all people into the family of God's love, to reach beyond their own walls (both physical & metaphorical), to include people unlike themselves, to go beyond welcome and friendliness. Here's another description from Carmichael:

*Radical Hospitality* means willingness "... to change behaviours in order to accommodate the needs and receive the talents of others. This change of behaviour or change of culture calls us to consider everything we do from not only our own perspective but the perspective of those we hope to reach. ... Christianity truly understood and lived says to others, I found something that works and blesses and gives me purpose and peace and so much more, and I want you to have it too."  
(<http://robbinsumc.org/clientimages/48111/messageseries/messagepdfs/radical%20hospitality.pdf>)

We don't have that same 'great commission'. We don't all share a compelling Biblical call to bring people into the family of God's love. There are certainly some UU's who feel this way, who are sustained by the Christian message, but as a denomination as a whole, we don't work to fulfill someone else's call, not any longer.

Still, for Unitarian Universalists, *Radical Hospitality* may very well hold some parallels to the Christian description. *Radical Hospitality*, for us, means to make the effort to welcome those who are not obviously like us ... to reach out beyond our walls (both physical & metaphorical) ... to offer a message of loving community.

A UU *Radical Hospitality* means fully embracing our core Principles: recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of all, for example. This means challenging ourselves to be gracious to all people – not just liberal, like-minded people. It means learning about people who are not exactly the same – so that they can feel welcome, and included, if they are brave enough to enter our space. It means reaching out beyond our safety, to welcome people wherever they are – and to invite them here, should they want to come.

It's a difference between:

"if you find us, and if you're enough like us to understand what's going on, and if you act like us, you are welcome here..."

compared to

"we see you, and would like to welcome and accompany you in, if you would like

to join us..."

or even better...

"We are invested in your well-being, and are willing to walk along-side you, wherever that takes us, if you wish"

There is no "one right message" of Unitarian Universalism, beyond the pursuit of well-being, justice & goodwill for all. We are not inviting anyone into homogenous hospitality. The pursuit of meaning has different results for each of us. But we are aiming to create just, equitable, compassionate space, inside and outside of our walls.

The difference between these two approaches is that the Christian message requires *members to stretch*, but also requires the joiner to *take on the mantle of Christianity*. The UU message requires *members to stretch*, and the *joiner to choose for themselves*, what their mantle will be – maybe Christianity, likely something else. This is how UUs have become more diverse over time, theologically.

But change can be frightening, or intimidating. It requires us not only to reach out, but also to reach in, and to support one another as we go through it. Westwood's most current example is the recently completed "Freethinker Friendly Program". If you aren't familiar with the program, it is easily accessible on the UU Humanist Association website – just google "Freethinker Friendly UU" and it pops right up.

(<http://humanists.org/sites/humanists.org/files/FreethinkerFriendly.pdf>)

The point of the program is to ensure that non-theists (who might identify as Humanists, atheists or agnostics, but might prefer the non-theist description) – to ensure that non-theists are fully included and welcomed in our faith communities, and to promote that reality of worth and inclusion out into the wider world.

Any time we undertake a program like this, anxieties rise. It's normal. Your job, in response to anxiety – your own or someone else's – is to meet it with compassionate understanding. This is a part of the work of *Radical Hospitality* – being willing to go beyond what we find comfortable and easy, and to work through what might be challenging, in order to be truly open.

I opened this sermon with a story that I find offensive – in both directions. It was the story about seminary faculty telling new students that they would be 'fixed' by the end of their course of study.

I confess to being surprised, when the person in my class described their self as a theist. Coming from one of those small '60s fellowships, I had never heard a UU describe their self that way. But I was more surprised when the faculty member proposed to 'fix' them. Sure, they were laughing and joking at the time, but this person was a minority in the class, and the only person that the joke was made towards. You won't likely be surprised to hear that that student never returned.

Now, 10 years later, the tide is turning. In the US, the move toward ‘a language of reverence’ has led UUs toward more and more traditional imagery, and a distinct increase in God-language. In my friend’s class, the atheist was now the clear minority.

It is not surprising, then, that at this time, the UU Humanist Association is promoting a Freethinker Friendly Process. We clearly need to invite our seminaries into the program, as well.

In closing, we return to a UU Principle. The essence of *Radical Hospitality* is the willingness to sincerely recognize our interdependence to one another – our sacred 7<sup>th</sup> Principle – and to take the steps necessary to honour it ... even when, and maybe *especially when*, it might not be easy. We find the strength to do these difficult things, in the company of one another.

Our Principles unite us, guide us, inspire us. And when we dare to live into their deepest truths, we shift our life experience, and the experience of those around us. May we all be the on-going recipients of *Radical Hospitality*, from this precious community of love.

Blessed be and amen.

**“Connections and Conversations”, Rosemary Morrison**



**Meditation:**

**Words by Richard Wagamese from “Embers: One Ojibway’s Meditations.”**

There is such powerful eloquence in silence. True genius is knowing when to say nothing, to allow the experience, the moment itself, to carry the message, to say what needs to be said. Words are less important, less effective than feeling.

When you can sit in perfect silence with someone, you truly know how to communicate.

**Sermon: Connections and Conversations**

I’m not very good at listening to sage advice sometimes. In my homiletics class I learned that the most difficult and least favourite type of sermon or homily is called, “The Prophetic Voice.” Yes, most church goers agree the prophetic sermon is the least enjoyable, and yes, I am venturing into these shark infested waters this morning to deliver a ‘prophetic’ sermon. I will not be telling you your fortune or predicting the future, however, I will be ‘speaking the truth in love.’ Nothing about this sermon was created thinking exclusively about this congregation; however, there may be things that resonate with you about this or other congregations you have attended. The most important word to cling onto is ‘love,’ and I will very much be speaking from a place of love for you individually, for this congregation and our movement as a whole.

I started going to Winter Eliot near Seattle a couple of years ago. I was excited, it was my first UU experience outside of Canada. I figured I’d see a much more diverse group there that I had experienced – and... was very disappointed. There were very few people of

colour, and only one African-American. This person and I worked together on the worship team and I was surprised by how difficult it was for me to work with this person. I felt very uncomfortable with their suggestions and couldn't figure out how their suggestions could possibly work. I realize now this person was challenging my desire to have worship in a particular way using a particular system, and I also realize the style of worship I prefer is based on an age old style of worship that came out of northern Europe; and it is based on Christian Judeo norms. Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison Reed has done a lot of research in the UU world on the type of worship people are interested in. His findings are that generally, most Caucasian people prefer a more intellectual type service in a format based on this Northern European style, while those who do not have Northern European heritage generally prefer a more embodied style of worship with loose parameters.

What does that even mean?

I was on a webinar a few weeks ago called: "Decentering Whiteness in Worship". I learned a lot. I have always wondered why our denomination is not attracting people of colour or indigenous populations, or, you fill in the blank. This webinar helped me understand a little bit what may be going on. We – collectively us Unitarians have a very rigid style of worship, we need to be done in 60-65 minutes, there is not a lot of room in the service for creativity, and our services are often very intellectual. White people, mostly men write the majority of the readings that are read, and most of the leaders in our organization are white males. People who have been oppressed historically by northern European colonizers are not interested in this style of worship. What they want is a service that is much looser, has room in it for creativity; like singing the chorus of the hymn and few extra times or changing the format up. I can't really get my head around how all that would look, however, I think I could get into it. One of the leaders on the webinar was saying that his worship leaders get together every week for 3 hours and plan the worship. This allows time for creativity to happen he said; creative juices need time to start running. Of course I realize that is not possible with volunteers and time constraints, and I'm not suggesting anyone here needs to try anything different. However, if you wish to begin talking about why UU congregations are not attracting people of colour, indigenous people, economically diverse or any other form of diversity we can think of, this may be a good place to start. As I was attending the webinar I was reminded of a Unitarian service I attended a few months ago. In this service the musicians played 'Down By the Riverside' and the congregation really got into it. The chorus was repeated several times, folks started dancing and clapping, and it was a delightful experience. It opened up the service on a heart level and we were together for almost an hour before the sermon even started. I think that service was probably one of my all time favourite services that I have attended in a very long time. So how does this happen? How does worship services begin to take on a less white centered tone. One way I suppose is to have readings written by people of colour, experiment with different types of services: like song centered, story based services, ritual services, lamentations, vespers, poetry based services as well as changing up the order of service. Again, I'm of course not telling anyone what to do, that is not my place. However, there have been some interesting developments in our movement and we are being called upon

to reflect on what is going on and to think about those on the margins. Perhaps today is the day when you begin to de-centre whiteness in your congregation. I think the project takes a lifetime and is not something to do alone. Perhaps, it is not the time and that is okay too.

I know that many congregations in Canada feel a little distant from the Canadian Unitarian Council, and very separate from the Unitarian Universalist Association, headquartered in Boston. I have personally found myself more and more drawn into what is going on in the UUA and I want to tell you that I was confused about a lot of things. No one person can know everything that is going on at the UUA, however, I do know one thing, what is going on is very important and needs to be talked about. I began to get some understanding of the issue when I was in Chicago taking the UU History course. During that week, Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison Reed came in and talked to us about the difficult relationship the UUA has had historically with people of colour. One might assume that because Unitarians are so liberal, tolerant and progressive, it would mean that anyone who wished to work for or become a minister would not have barriers placed. However, this is not historically correct. Mark has pointed out case after case of blatant racism among the UUA ranks. Of course that is all in the past, or is it? As recent as this spring, the UUA was been called out for it's hiring practices; the fact that white men hold a very high percentage of the top leadership positions within our denomination is an uncomfortable fact to comprehend. I personally have found this hard to believe, however, the facts are there to prove the point. Some of you may or may not have heard about this big kaffuffle that happened. *(ask for a show of hands and invite people to say what they know about this.)*

The term 'white supremacy' is being used to discuss what is going on in our denomination. I have generally been uncomfortable with this term; I thought it is much too harsh, however, I can see the point. From the materials the UUA has put out: 'Why 'white supremacy' as the term here? It conjures up images of hoods and mobs. Here, we mean: White supremacy as a set of institutional assumptions and practices, often operating unconsciously, that tend to benefit white people and exclude people of colour. In 2017, actual 'white supremacists' are not required in order to uphold white supremacist culture. Building a denomination full of people who understand that key distinction is essential as we work toward a more just society in difficult political times."<sup>1</sup> The question is asked: How does this show up in our congregations? There are several categories or ideas that can be pondered. We can say we don't have a problem here in Canada because we don't have the same racial issues as they have in the states, however, we in Canada still have a problem because our congregations are dis-proportionately white compared to the general population. Here are some of the characteristics of a culture that values northern European or 'white' standards. These are: Perfectionism – mistakes aren't just mistakes, or a tendency to identify what's wrong; little ability to identify, name, and appreciate what's

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<sup>1</sup> Black Lives Of Unitarian Universalism. *UU White Supremacy Teachin Resources*, <http://www.blacklivesuu.com/teach-in-resources/>, accessed: July 2, 2017.

right. Antidote: develop a culture of appreciation, learn how to give helpful feedback, speak to the things that went well.

Another one: A sense of urgency: continued sense of urgency makes it difficult to take time to be inclusive – antidote: realizing that things take longer than anyone expects, discuss and plan for what it means to set goals of inclusivity and diversity. Defensiveness: a lot of energy in the organization is spent trying to make sure that people’s feelings aren’t getting hurt or working around defensive people: Antidote: understand the link between defensiveness and fear, give people credit for being able to handle more than you think. *(another one)* The belief there is one right way to do things and once people are introduced to the right way, they will see the light and adopt it. Antidote: Accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal, work on developing the ability to notice when people do things differently and how those different ways might improve your approach. There are many other ideas: Some of these are: either/or thinking; power hoarding; fear of open conflict; I’m the only one; progress means bigger or ‘more’. If anyone is interested in reading this resource, I’d be happy to send it to the office for distribution.

I’ve been reading everything I can get my hands on lately about this issue. There has been so much discussion among my colleagues and at General Assembly in New Orleans last month, it was at the top of the agenda. A task force was struck to look at the ways in which ‘white supremacy’ has affected the UUA, not just in its hiring practices. Why am I even talking about it? Do you think it’s important to talk about? I would like to pause here and give people a chance to think about and talk about this issue together. This needs to be talked about and asked questions of. If you wish to, turn to a neighbour or two and make a little discussion group of two or three people. I’ll give you a few minutes to talk. I’ll ring the bowl to indicate switching up so everyone has a chance to speak. *(Bring people back to the larger group... ask if any one would like to share what they had discussed... asked if there are any questions for the congregation as a whole, or to me.)*

Conclusion: I am deeply troubled that so many people feel left out or hurt or unwelcome in our congregations. I believe strongly in inclusivity and have always watched out for the people on the margins. How can we as a group of loving people do this work together, what can we do individually and what structures do we need to question in order for the larger organization to be more inclusive and diverse? The work that begins with open loving hearts ready to learn is the best we can do.

So may it be, Amen.

**Bless a Stranger with a Smile – Monica Cummings – is an African American woman from Wisconsin who works for the UUA.**

Take time each day to remember you are a part of the interconnected web of life. Bless a stranger with a smile. Tell the people in your life how much they mean to you. And take a moment every day, beginning today, to give thanks for all that you have.

May you have the strength, courage, and commitment to begin or continue the rewarding journey of self-understanding. May you have the wisdom to forgive yourselves, the grace to ask for forgiveness, and the compassion to forgive others. You are the co-creator of your life. It's up to you. May you live your beliefs and feel at one with everyone and everything.

Blessings upon you,  
Blessings upon me,  
Blessings upon every living thing,  
Blessed Be.

### **Sources and resources:**

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### **The Lure of the Spirit, Rev. Phillip Hewett**



Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?  
Mystery, mystery. Life is a riddle and a mystery.

That song has recently come to be widely used in Unitarian circles. It speaks to our condition. It was composed less than two decades ago, yet the questions it asks have haunted the human mind for millennia. But no matter who asks such questions or tries to answer them, we don't begin as though we were the first people in creation. We stand, as the title of our hymnbook reminds us, in a living tradition, and if you want to take a closer look at that tradition you have only to read one of the histories of the Unitarian movement, which will tell you what Unitarians have been thinking and doing for the better part of five centuries.

What you might not find in those histories is any full account of the extent to which our tradition was influenced by the wider world of thought and practice into which it came and within which it developed. That wider world was dominated by the Christian tradition, already more than fifteen hundred years old when the Unitarian movement came into being. Some of our histories try to follow Unitarian roots back into that earlier period, and whether such roots are there or not, there can be no doubt at all that the ongoing Christian

tradition did influence Unitarian thinking about who we are and where we come from, so we do well to take a quick look at that tradition.

Right from the start, it has said, not that the ultimate questions of life are a riddle and a mystery, but that those questions have been answered and the mystery solved. All that is required of us is the intellectual process called believing. Those who follow this course can just be called believers, as opposed to unbelievers. Foremost among their beliefs was a belief in God. Now if we go on to ask what we mean when we say “God”, this could lead right back into mystery. But no – according to the tradition God could be described and defined with a precision that someone – I forget who – once compared to that of an entomologist describing the anatomy of a black beetle. God, it was said, was personal. In fact he (and it was always “he”, never “she”) he consisted of three persons who were yet only one, so some mystery re-entered the picture. The three persons were designated Father, Son and Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit (the word is the same in most languages). The first two were human in form – the Father as an elderly but vigorous male with a flowing beard, as Michelangelo was commissioned to depict him in the famous painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican; the Son as Jesus with or on the Cross; the Holy Ghost usually as a dove. If you go to Vienna you will see on one of most prominent sites in the city a statue of God erected as a thanksgiving for deliverance from the plague three and a half centuries ago. This is a high column, ornamented with angels, which presumably represents oneness, with three figures at the top as I have just described them.

The three persons are called co-equal, though there is some confusion here, for the creed recited by believers says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, to which the Western Catholic tradition, but not the Eastern Orthodox one, adds “and from the Son”. The Son is called the “only-begotten”, which raises further problems, for begetting, of course, requires male and female partners. The female partner here is not divine, but human: Mary, who is none the less called a virgin, though known as the Mother of God. But she was said to have been impregnated not by the Father but by the Holy Ghost.

Why am I reminding you of all this? Unitarians have never accepted this scheme of things, so why is it relevant to our concerns today? Well, let me go back to where I started. We too have a tradition which has wrestled with ultimate mystery, and that tradition has been unavoidably influenced by the wider tradition that surrounded it as it evolved. Our forerunners felt that within the mystery with which they were presented was some kind of Unity; that was why they were called Unitarians. But what kind of picture-language could one use? Jesus, as we all know, did his teaching in the picture-language of stories and parables and metaphors, and he had said of the ultimate mystery of our existence that it was just as if a loving Father were caring for the whole of creation. His literal-minded followers took this as an exact description of the nature of things, and this eventually resulted in the idea of what I have already described as God the Father.

So it came about that the earliest Unitarians, as they looked for appropriate language to speak of the ultimate mystery upholding the universe, seized upon this metaphor of

fatherhood as it was expressed in the first person of the traditional Trinity. Obviously they could not have chosen the second person, for Jesus, after all, was a human prophet like Jeremiah. And they don't seem to have given real consideration to the Holy Spirit. It was a fateful decision, but a natural one, living as they did in a world permeated with the idea of the dominant male. So "the fatherhood of God" became the first in the list of characteristic Unitarian beliefs, the second being "the brotherhood of man". That was the way it was for centuries, and some congregations even had those words inscribed on the wall of their place of worship. The church in Ottawa was one such example.

The big change that has taken place during our lifetime – certainly in mine – is that even as a metaphor this expression "the fatherhood of God" has come to a dead end. Not only do most present-day Unitarians find it unhelpful, but for many it has so poisoned the word God itself that they refuse to use it, and in some cases go so far as to declare themselves atheists. Life is too much of a riddle and a mystery for us to call ourselves believers in that traditional sense. And what I want to set before you this morning is a proposition that all this is the result of our forerunners having made the wrong choice so many years ago, when they took as their model the first person of the traditional Trinity, the Father, rather than the third, the Holy Spirit. I don't want to suggest that this feeling for the primacy of the Spirit was never there in Unitarian circles in the past. It surfaced from time to time, particularly in hymns and poetry back in the nineteenth century, but is coming to the forefront only now that so many disillusioned people are looking all over the world for some form of expression that they will find meaningful.

Once again, as in the past, much of the inspiration for this change is coming from outside our own movement. For half a century now there have been many religious leaders in the traditional churches who have been pointing in that direction, and we have to run to keep up with them. I have spent a good deal of time this summer trying to do precisely that. It's always exciting to find someone articulating ideas that you have been working out for yourself, and taking them forward into new dimensions. That has been my experience in reading one book in particular. It is called *In the Beginning was the Spirit, and the author*, strange though it may sound, is an Irish Catholic priest, named Diarmuid O'Murchu. He himself concedes that for some people his insights may, in his words, "feel unorthodox to the point of being outrageous or even heretical." [page 196] But he goes on to point out how many prominent religious thinkers in the recent past, and some even before that, have been saying much the same things. He quotes repeatedly from many of them, including Sallie McFague, who has the title of Distinguished Theologian in Residence at the Vancouver School of Theology. I have had the pleasure and profit of going to several of her courses, and it has also been my privilege on a couple of occasions to hear directly from O'Murchu, when he has come to Vancouver with substantial support from both Anglican and United churches.

Let me tell you very briefly what he was saying in the book to which I referred. As I said earlier, the traditional idea was that in trying to respond to the ultimate mystery of being, you were supposed to start out by believing and to become a believer. Believer in

what? Answer: in a revelation from on high of ultimate truth as expressed in the traditional creeds. Fewer and fewer people can believe in that any more. It was caricatured in a book I once saw with the title, *What God has Revealed to Man*. When you opened it you found that all the pages were completely blank. But O'Murchu says that's not where you start at all. You start at a more practical level, with experience: in his words, "from the ability to closely observe, monitor, and discern the richness of human experience" [page 5]. We go on to try to understand and interpret our experience, using a background of information far beyond anything available in the past. This has been given by science, where the procedure has been one of reasoning from what has been observed. But there is more to it than that. "When one reads the life stories of the outstanding scientists," he says, "one quickly begins to see another side to their remarkable genius. They trusted their hunches, they honoured intuitions, and they extensively followed their creative imaginations" [page 5]. When I read that, I thought back to the course in philosophy of science that I was able to take years ago as part of my training for the ministry, with James Bryant Conant, the president of Harvard and one of the most distinguished scientists of the day saying the same thing. And I share too in the feeling O'Murchu says he gets from such research, which, in his words again, "awakens for me a sense of awe, wonder and reverence for the elegance and complexity that characterizes the creative universe", leading him to "think of God primarily as a force for creativity, manifested first and foremost in the living creation itself" [page 14].

This is the core of the proposal he is presenting. For what is the new consensus in science? In his words again, "The new physics highlighted the central role of energy as the basis of all created reality. Energy could never be destroyed; it was always transformed into other energy forms. What was that inner power energizing the energy? Scientists could not answer the question", but he came up with the proposal that "the Holy Spirit of God energizes the energy." This model of what we mean by God departs radically, of course, from the model we were given in the dominant Christian tradition, of a being like a human king or lord ruling the universe from above the sky, implicit in the phrase "the Fatherhood of God". O'Murchu quotes with approval what a couple of other contemporary religious thinkers have said: "God is an activity rather than a person", and "God is our name for the creativity in nature. Indeed, this potent symbol can help orient us in our lives. Using the word God to mean the creativity in nature can help bring us to the care and reverence that creativity deserves" [page 58].

These references to nature lead us into the other major source of O'Murchu's proposal: the insights of First Nations – insights shared by aboriginal people not only here in North America, but throughout the world. As he puts it, "Their faith begins with what they call the Great Spirit. That is their original source, and from that source everything in creation emanates; the Great Spirit is the energetic wellspring of pregnant possibilities." [page 4]

As I read that, I reflected on the arrogance with which we so-called civilized Western people have treated those we used not so long ago to call ignorant savages whose primitive superstitions could be dismissed with contempt. We are fast learning better now, but only after our own way of looking at and treating the earth has created such a shambles not only

in the world around us but in our own thinking. Moreover, as we look back to our own past, we find that our distant ancestors looked at the world in the same way as First Nations do today, and shared this reverence for the Great Spirit manifested throughout Nature. Picking up from there, O'Murchu writes: "I trust the foundational wisdom of indigenous peoples.... I embrace the core insight that the Great Spirit inhabits the whole of creation and has done so from time immemorial. I also detect a deep truth in the perception that the Great Spirit represents what theology and religion call the Divine Life, although not necessarily a personal life force. First-nations people do not speculate on the nature – or even the function – of the Great Spirit. They experience the Spirit as ultra-real, and mediated primarily through the surrounding creation that they consider to be alive, every bit as much as humans are alive. The Great Spirit transcends human identity, yet embraces everything authentically human. The Great Spirit is more foundational to spiritual/religious meaning than the Christian notion of the Trinity, or indeed the theistic constructs of any of the great religions." [page 11]

This takes us right back to where we began. I suggested that the old Unitarian model of the Fatherhood of God was based on a wrongful choice of the first person of the orthodox Trinity, the Father, rather than the third, the Holy Spirit. I said that was in tune with the patriarchal emphasis of the times. And it may have had something to do with pictures you could draw, as I illustrated from that monument in Vienna. The Spirit is depicted as a bird – a dove – and birds were of course considered of much less importance than humans in the scheme of things. But why a bird? I haven't tried to research scholarly opinions on this, but it strikes me that birds are airborne, and you can't draw a picture of air. If you go back to the sources of the Jewish and Christian traditions in the Bible, you find that in both the original Hebrew and Greek, the word for Spirit is the same as the word for air, or wind, or breath: ruach in Hebrew and pneuma in Greek. I could note in passing that ruach is almost always feminine, and pneuma is neuter, while when you translate into Latin, spiritus becomes masculine.

Take a look now at that great and moving passage with which the whole Bible begins. Here is how the English translation reads in the New Revised Standard Version: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." There is a footnote which says that this last phrase could also be translated as "while the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters", or again: "while a mighty wind swept over the face of the waters." If you go down now to the different story of creation in the second chapter of Genesis, you read about human origins: "God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." The word "man" here, I should add, means exactly that – woman comes later – but the point is that it is the breath of God that gives him life – in other words the Spirit. Whether you choose to use the word God or not makes no practical difference. For my part, I agree with O'Murchu that it's time to rehabilitate the idea of God as the Great Spirit -- or, as he sometimes puts it, the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Mystery. It may well

engender in us the traditional First Nations reverence and care for our Mother the earth before we wreck the whole planet.

One final word. O'Murchu, like a number of recent Christians, reinterprets the concept of the Trinity to his own satisfaction, not in its original dogmatic form, but as an archetypal symbol of relationship. In his words, "the divine life force is first and foremost a relational matrix...a primordial commitment to relationality and desiring it throughout the whole of creation, and not merely within human beings". Once again this is something to which I respond. I have long maintained that you and I find our ultimate identity in a network of relationships, and in view of his feeling for First Nations, I am amazed that O'Murchu does not mention the great classic phrase "all my relations" that they use as they speak of the world of which we are part. And once again, this is not just a playing with words, but a guide to the practice of living. So while I think it could be quite misleading to say that this means I subscribe to a doctrine of the Trinity, I do feel part of that deep community of life as I too say "all my relations".

### **Future Themes**

We join with close to twenty other Canadian Unitarian congregations in engaging with these themes over the coming months. Thematic resource packets are available on our website, and through the Chalice Lighter as of the first weekend in the month.

March: Risk

April: Transformation

May: Embodiment