

# The Unitarian Congregation of Niagara

In this introduction to the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara (UCN). I present an overview of Unitarian Principles and a personal reflection on how those principles are expressed in our local congregation. I have been a member of UCN for two years and it has become a place for my spiritual exploration and expression of my social justice interests.

The UCN is a member congregation of the Canadian Unitarian Council, the Canadian Unitarian Social Justice Network and the Unitarian Universalists Association. As members of these associations we affirm and promote The 7 Unitarian Principles:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person.
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations.
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregation.
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Members of UCN, at a summer retreat, confirmed that we want to be an inviting community and a liberal religious voice for Niagara. Our members represent a variety of religious faith groups as well as secular humanists, agnostics and atheists. We are officially a "Welcoming Congregation" have completed a Unitarian Universalist Association program and passed a congregational vote to affirm that we welcome the membership and active participation of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people.

Our Sunday services from September through May are a mix of ritual, music and presentations relating to spirituality and social justice. Our

rituals include a chalice lighting, responsive readings and "joys and concerns." Musically, we enjoy splendid piano performances of preludes, offertory music, postludes and accompaniment of a Choir and Congregational singing. We do not have a minister, but rather, have lay chaplains and service leaders. Lay chaplains offer weddings, child dedications, and memorial services. Addresses at our Sunday services are presented by members, guest speakers and visiting ministers. Some recent examples include: "Imagine....Peace", "Gratitude", and "Poverty in Niagara". Upcoming services include "Migrant Workers in Niagara", and "A Unitarian Universalist View of the Christmas Story". Coffee and snacks are served after each service and once a month we have a "soupalicious" lunch following the service. In addition to weekly services, we have regular choir rehearsals, a monthly film night, a "non-threatening" bridge night, a book club and "Building your own Theology" programs. Summer services are less formal and revolve around discussions led by one of our members.

Our social justice/action commitments include: participation in Out of the Cold and Harvest Festival; collection of items for Gillian's Place; Fair Trade Sundays and financial contributions to the Unitarian Services Committee, AIDS Niagara, Climate Action Niagara, RAFT, and Child Haven International. Recently, in association with Climate Action Niagara, a few of us helped weed and clean up a local, wheelchair accessible community garden. Our sanctuary is used by a Buddhist meditation group, PFLAG, Niagara Action for Animals and other groups with a social justice or spiritual exploration focus.

More information about Unitarianism and UCN is available on our website at <http://www.unitarian-stcatharines.org>. Should you decide to visit our congregation, please note that the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara is a fragrance-free-zone. In order to make this a safe and welcoming environment for everyone who comes here, we ask that you refrain from wearing fragrances.