



# UNITARIAN CONGREGATION OF NIAGARA

*A church for people  
with enquiring minds*

**Our Mission Statement: “We covenant to support an empowering church that affirms the individual and celebrates history, science and mystery in a welcoming, joyous and evolving fellowship.”**

## February 2021

### Upcoming Services

**February 7 - Serenity** - presented and led by Karen Stovell

What is serenity? Can we really EVER be serene, especially in these times?

**February 14 - Champlain's Dream** - presented and led by Russell Baird

Russ will introduce us to Samuel de Champlain: French soldier, spy, master mariner, explorer, cartographer, artist and Father of New France.

**February 21 -Why It's Important to Listen to People Who Disagree** - YouTube Presentation by Zachary R. Wood

Wood believes that uncomfortable conversations represent opportunities for learning and the first step towards social change. Service led by LesLee Turmel

**February 28 - Annual General Meeting** - The AGM is key to our growth. It provides an opportunity for our members and friends to come together, remind ourselves of our congregation's vision and values, and ensure we are all on the same page for the upcoming year. We invite all members to attend, encourage you to share in discussion and vote on matters important to UCN. Meeting chaired by Penny Blake

**“Radiate an energy of serenity and peace so that you  
have an uplifting effect on those you come into  
contact with.”**

~ Dr. Wayne Dyer



**Serenity is not freedom from the storm, it is peace within the storm.**

~ unknown



**Unitarian Congregation  
of Niagara**

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**2020/2021**

**PRESIDENT:**

Penny Blake

**VICE PRESIDENT:**

Matt Virro

**PAST PRESIDENT:**

Anita Miecznikowski

**SECRETARY: Roy Blake**

**TREASURER:**

Erdwin Hueniken

**MEMBER AT LARGE:**

Liina Veer

**PROGRAM:**

LesLee Turmel

**SOCIAL ACTION:**

Beryl Stovell

**LAY CHAPLAINS:**

Doreen Peever

Karen Stovell

**ADULT RELIGIOUS**

EDUCATION: Karen Stovell

**CHOIR and MUSIC:**

Penny Blake /

Karen Stovell

**COMMUNICATIONS:**

Roy Blake

**DENOMINATIONAL AFFAIRS:**

Elaine Edmiston

**LAY CHAPLAINCY:**

Doreen Peever

**MEMBERSHIP:**

Doreen Peever

**NEWSLETTER:**

LesLee Turmel

**PASTORAL CARE:**

Doreen Peever /

Joan Rothman

**PROPERTY: Alan and Hilde**

Wheeler

**RENTAL: Alan and Hilde**

Wheeler

**SOCIAL: Susan Velkers, Jim**

Glassford, Karen Stovell,

Abu Hosein

**TRUSTEES:**

Jim Glassford

Jenny Leach

Doreen Peever

## Annual General Meeting...

Our AGM is scheduled for Sunday, February 28, 2021 at 11:00 a.m.  
This year's meeting will be conducted on Zoom.

Voting rights are held by all members, but friends and visitors are welcome to attend. If you need to vote by proxy, please contact Doreen Peever who will provide you with the information you require.

The UCN bylaws constitute proxies for meetings requiring a quorum of 2/3 of our membership. The AGM, however, requires a quorum of only 1/3 of our membership. It is our custom to include proxies for our AGM. The bylaws will be revised, if necessary, to reflect this practice when the board reconvenes.

– Penny Blake

## Pub Night

**February 25, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. Via Zoom**

February's theme is Democracy.

“I want all of you to get up out of your chairs. I want you to get up right now and go to the window. Open it and stick your head out and yell, I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore.”

- Paddy Chayefsky

Howard Beale, in the movie Network, asked people to rise up in a world in which there is no America, no democracy. Are we at that point now 45 years later? Is democracy the same for all? Have we been, this past year, off our feet defending it? What do we make of world events that lead us to think we can manage democracy?

Let's get together and discuss!

As always, all are welcome.

The Zoom link will be provided later this month.

– Matt Virro

## Looking for Photos!

UCN is revamping our website in 2021. We are looking for photos which demonstrate the vibrancy of our membership and the activities in which we have participated. If you have any photos in your archives that you think would be of interest, please submit them to Roy Blake at [ucn.communications@gmail.com](mailto:ucn.communications@gmail.com)

Thank you!

– Matt Virro

# President's Message . . .

Yesterday we had a service to deal with 'Social Action.' It was both a broad and far reaching discussion of issues that we will delve into deeper, including justice and reconciliation with Native peoples and the environment. Our involvement could be on a global or national scale, or more close at hand, like the homeless people at our back door. The preference of our congregation, as indicated by the first Social Action Survey,\* is that most of our efforts be directed to local issues. We also have results from the second Social Action Survey.\*\* The Social Action Committee, chaired by Beryl Stovell, will use these surveys as guidance to determine how undistributed monies from 2019 will be allotted.

This a large topic. There are a plethora of social action organizations addressing a vast array of issues. I reached out to other Unitarian congregations to find out what they were doing. Although I am pleased with the fact that we were a giving congregation, I was not altogether happy with the general lack of knowledge we have about these organizations. Our congregation has designated 10 percent of our budget towards Social Action goals in the hope of keeping us vital, energized and growing. It seems that for many years we struggled just to keep our congregation out of deficit, and our donations had little to do with congregational life. How can we keep vital and grow? And how can we become more visible within the community? These are goals we need to keep in mind as we age and our congregational numbers diminish. It comes down to two questions. How can we better utilize our donations to fit our congregational life? And how can we do it in a fiscally responsible manner?

Besides budget designations, we can become better informed about organizations to which we contribute. These can be small or large presentations by various organizations or by our own congregants. We can conduct direct drives for funds, as we have in the past, for Positive Living, Community Care or other food bank donations. We can engage in letter writing en masse to organizations such as Amnesty International or to our politicians on important issues such as the environment, human rights and racism. There can be fund raisers like an evening of UCN's Got Talent and we can make a concerted effort to promote our building for meetings.

These last two methods are also a means of creating more visibility. For many, a fund raiser or a meeting is a less intimidating way to find out more about us than attending a service.

I am willing to help with Fund Raisers. I have experience, especially with concerts, but I need the help of others. If you have a creative bent or some ideas, please let me know.

Whew! As I said, this is a large topic with many ramifications.

As we are a small congregation, we only have so many funds and so many people. These limitations can be frustrating. But don't worry, even Bill Gates cannot fill all the wants and needs in the world.

As always, I go back to the sages for guidance.

"You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." - Rabbi Tarfon

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And being only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" - Hillel the Elder

With these thoughts in mind, I am sure we can come up with a Social Action Plan that is generous, balanced and wise. – Penny Blake

## Summary of First Survey\*

Members and friends of UCN want:

- Input
- Support for local initiatives
- Support for long term and one time commitments
- Support for letter writing campaigns
- Support for a combination of financial contributions and volunteer work
- Partnership with community agencies or services

## Summary of Second Survey\*\*

Organizations which membership wants to support and votes for each:

Start Me Up Niagara - 10  
Gillian's Place - 6  
Out of the Cold - 6  
RAFT - 4  
Seed Change/Seed Diversity - USC - 2  
Women's Place - 1  
Community Care - 1  
Kristen French Child Advocacy - 1  
Positive Living - 1  
Niagara Community Legal Clinic - 1  
Brock University Sexual Violence - 1  
CAMH - 1  
Niagara Centre for Independent Living - 1  
Second Harvest - 1  
Project Share - 1  
Greening Niagara - 1  
Niagara Native Centre - 1



### Lay Chaplains:

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Karen Stovell  
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Deadline for

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**February 17, 2021**

### Unitarian Congregation of Niagara

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## Unitarian Universalist Midwinter Retreat - February 6, 2021 - Online

This is 32<sup>nd</sup> year in which Unitarian Universalists have gathered for a February retreat. This year's will be different, for obvious reasons. It will be online, for one day only on Saturday, February 6, 2021.

As usual, there will be a keynote speaker, interesting workshops on a variety of topics, and a social evening featuring a cabaret, games and conversations. Our theme this year will be "Going Viral"!

You can find the most up to date event information on the web at <https://uumidwinterretreat.blogspot.com/>

The schedule and registration information are being finalized as of this writing. The keynote speaker will be Liz James, founder of the Unitarian Universalist Hysterical Society and it's famous Coffee Hour Facebook page.

If you have any questions about this year's Midwinter Retreat, please call me.

– Roy Blake, Organizing Committee

### Thinking Outside the Box of Chocolates



"Use your ears more than your tongue and you will be better for it," my father directed. Those words of wisdom were imparted for a reason. I was impetuous and keen to share what my father thought were youthful and objectionable opinions. Now with over 70 years of practice, I am closer to reliably honouring my father's edict. But I do have moments of deliberate absent mindedness. Such is the case with St. Valentine's Day.

The origin of St. Valentine's Day is hazy. Various stories have been forwarded, from the holiday finding its roots in pagan ritual or Roman history or Christianity or some combination thereof, until it has morphed into the holiday we know today. Its celebration relentlessly continues. Card writers, chocolatiers, florists, vintners, restaurateurs and lapidaries creatively and convincingly entice us with the notion the best way to express our love is through the acquisition of products. Is there not a better way to affirm and share our love?

Don't get me wrong. I am not opposed to love, its expression or its celebration. Yet, every year I pose the same questions. What is Valentine's Day like for those of us who have never found love or felt loved or have lost a love or in search for a meaningful love? And what of those who are truly alone or heartbreakingly lonely? Why, in a world where there is such a need for compassion and empathy, must we feel obliged to celebrate our love exclusively when this planet yearns for inclusivity?

This Valentine's Day, think outside of the typical box of chocolates. Spend the evening volunteering, serving those in need of a meal, or spend the afternoon cleaning out your stuff you don't need but others might, or go grocery shopping and deliver your finds to Community Care. You can share this activity with your partner or with your children or with a good friend or as a singular effort to express love to others. You can tenderly plant wild flower seedlings to nurture and return to the earth in spring. Or pledge to plant a tree in memory of a love lost or a love found or a love renewed. Go out of your way to speak to a friend or family member. Walk your neighbour's dog or accompany your neighbour on the walk. Create and sing a song for someone who has brought love into your life. Give a total stranger a flower. Give yourself a flower. Give of yourself and give from your heart. A celebration of love ought to include everyone. – LesLee Turmel