



What do we call ourselves?

Centres for Hope and Inspiration?

On 6 September 2019, Mary Bennett, on behalf of *Vancouver Unitarians*, posed a question to the 294 members of the CUC leaders' google group about what Canadian Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist congregations, churches, fellowships, and neighbourhoods thought about their official and unofficial organizational names. The response from across Canada was fast and strong. Here is the initial query, followed by the responses from 25 leaders posted over the subsequent 8 days.

- Compiled and gently edited for ease of reference by Keith Wilkinson, Vancouver Unitarians

The initial query to the CUC leaders' group -

5 Sep 2019 Mary Bennett sharingucv@gmail.com

Subject: *The name of your/our congregation/s*

The Board at Vancouver Unitarians (Unitarian Church of Vancouver) has approved a Task Force named "What Do We Call Ourselves?" for the congregation to consider whether our principles and values are best represented by being known as a Church or whether a different descriptor may better represent our diverse population and potential new members. We would be grateful to learn how other Congregations have addressed this or not. At present in Canada 13 congregations are churches, another 13 are congregations, 15 are fellowships. Please let us know!

In particular, if your congregation has at any point changed (or voted on whether to change) your name, we would greatly appreciate hearing the process you used and the results.

Many of us are using an informal "branding" of Somewhere Unitarians. At UCV the board adopted a resolution for a new logo and to use "Vancouver Unitarians" in our communications back in 2004 but our legal name has remained Unitarian Church of Vancouver. If your congregation uses a different informal name vs your official legal name, any comments on how you distinguish which to use would also be appreciated.

Mary Bennett, on behalf of UCV *What Do We Call Ourselves* (previously Name Change) Task Force

Responses

8 Sep 2019 President Cvuf cvufpresident@gmail.com

Hi Mary

We are a Fellowship

AND like many others we informally call ourselves The **Comox Valley** Unitarians.

Our worship committee is now called the Community Gathering Team etc. etc.

If you would like more info just let me know

In Fellowship

Dan

I guess my sign off gives it away ;-)



8 Sep 2019 Margaret Wanlin mwanlin@tbaytel.net

We are a Fellowship in **Thunder Bay**, as well.

I'm thinking our naming problem extends beyond what we call ourselves as a collective.

Unitarian Universalist is a very long and not easy to understand name. 10 syllables that don't convey an accessible message. I think [this] is an important and larger question.

Thanks for starting the conversation.

Cheers

Margaret

8 Sep 2019 Art Brewer art.brewer@sympatico.ca

Hi everyone,

In a way, I facilitated an online discussion roughly 15 years ago about what we call ourselves when I created some 2"x2" window decals (for cars, or home) to promote our name.

There was no general agreement, so I created three decals, each of which featured our national logo with the following text underneath:

1. UNITARIANS
2. UNITARIANS (but the second A was replaced by a letter size version of our logo so that it could be read as an A or an E, making it bilingual. I stole this idea from Canadian Airlines, for those who remember)
3. UNITARIANS & UNIVERSALISTS.

I sold them all at cost at a few of our annual meetings. #1 was by far the most popular, followed by #2. #3 hardly sold at all.

And it seems we still don't know what to call ourselves!

PS I still have 2 copies of #1, 23 copies of #2 and 53 copies of #3. \$1 each, free shipping!

Art Brewer in **Toronto** (doesn't make me a bad person)

8 Sep 2019 Karen Dunk-Green karen@dunk-green.com

Great story Art!

The debate surely does continue, both in regard to being Unitarians or Unitarian Universalists and to the question of being a congregation or a fellowship or a church.

Our name reflects our decision (when? by whom?, I don't actually know) that we are a "Congregation", and we take some pains to remember to use that term as much as possible.



Still, the term church is so embedded in the culture at large that many people use it by reflex even if, when asked, they agree the term congregation makes more sense to them. I watch others bristle or vocally object when this happens.

Like many things in our faith, I think the debate about "which xxx is best?" belies the real challenge, which is to accept that we won't be able to agree - and that's our point. We are a faith that doesn't require that we agree; it requires that we grow comfortable and capable of loving the people we disagree with instead of bristling and objecting. This was a wonderful topic for consideration at last year's Eastern Gathering.

Nonetheless, I suppose we all have to choose (by democratic means) one thing to name ourselves on our buildings and our letterhead! - but then relax when some people choose to speak an alternative name out loud.

(apologies if this is not answering anyone's question in this thread ... it is what came to my mind.)

Karen Dunk-Green, **First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto**

8 Sep 2019 jgreen@myaccess.ca

I have really enjoyed this conversation and think the most important part for me is in Karen's email. I quote again:

*Like many things in our faith, I think the debate about "which xxx is best?" belies the real challenge, which is to accept that we won't be able to agree - and that's our point. **We are a faith that doesn't require that we agree; it requires that we grow comfortable and capable of loving the people we disagree with instead of bristling and objecting.** This was a wonderful topic for consideration at last year's Eastern Gathering.*

Thanks so much,

Joanne Green, **Regina**

8 Sep 2019 Lorna Weigand lornamweigand@gmail.com

Don Heights is a congregation. **Don Heights Unitarian Congregation**. I started googling "congregation" and found that the word is also used to describe groups of animals such as a congregation of eagles [Canadian Press 1 Dec News 2018 - Congregation of Eagles](#). It's given me a new appreciation of using this word to describe our local groups.

Lorna Weigand, DH

9 Sep 2019 luci.dilkus@gmail.com

Good morning from Tiny;

We are a very small group and call ourselves the **Huronia Unitarian Fellowship**, and I think it's perfect; although I have found myself using "church" and "congregation", when speaking about us with non UU's who don't know and don't understand what we are.

Luci, HUF



9 Sep 2019 markmr@hotmail.com

Hello,

As noted this is an ongoing (and old conversation/debate?). I refer you to *Guarding Sacred Embers: Reflections on Canadian Unitarian and Universalist History*. Check "What's in a Name?" which begins on page 239. [KW note: Book doesn't seem to be available online at this time. Check your local libraries.]

All the best,

Mark Morrison-Reed, **Toronto**

9 Sep 2019 joelpater4@gmail.com

Hi,

We in Kingston have called ourselves "**Kingston Unitarian Fellowship**" for as long as we've had a name - about 50 years. I don't remember any discussions of alternate names, although we did go through a naming exercise when we purchased our new building and ended up with *Kingston Unitarian Place*. The building has permanent commercial tenants and regular rentals from non-members, so we wanted to distinguish the building from the congregation.

Members call us "K" "U" "F" or "KUF."

Joe Pater KUF

9 Sep 2019 linda.winninger@rogers.com

Hello,

We have been a "fellowship" since our founding in 1953; the name chosen by the founding families was Unitarian Fellowship of London. We refer to ourselves as 'the UFL', or 'the fellowship', and to ourselves as 'UFLers', on a casual basis. I have never heard anyone say "London Fellowship".

There have been 2 attempts since 2000 to change our legal name to Unitarian Congregation of London; both motions were defeated at annual business meetings. The board at the time was caught off guard by the strength of the opposition to the motion.

The name change was also criticized by our Universalist members who wondered why only 'Unitarian' appeared in the suggested name.

After the second defeat, the name change issue was dropped. However, the board added the line "a Unitarian Universalist Congregation" to our letterhead directly underneath our official name. This was seen as a compromise and fortunately was accepted by the membership. On our website we describe ourselves as a congregation in many different places.

Linda Lincoln, **Unitarian Fellowship of London**

9 Sep 2019 ghanley@nb.sympatico.ca

Hi All, Interesting comments on what we call ourselves. We at the Unitarian Fellowship of Fredericton have also had this debate. Ours began around 2014/2015 with a desperate need to get a new, more



visible street sign for our property. The discussion on what to call ourselves was mildly controversial. We held a couple of congregational meetings and eventually put "Unitarian Congregation" on the sign. We have been making a concerted effort to grow our membership and to attract younger people in particular. Some of us felt young people would not relate to the term "fellowship".

I know that a few people were never convinced of the need to change our name. But, as someone suggested, isn't it very Unitarian to agree to disagree?

We did not change our official, business name. We assumed that might involve some expense and we had already forked out over \$2,000 for the sign. And it ended up to be a two-year project.

In casual conversation we still most often refer to "the fellowship". I personally try to avoid the word "church" but at times it is the easiest way to make a connection for non-UUs.

The debate over the name got mixed up with the debate over the sign itself (there were a few people who didn't agree that we needed the new sign). In retrospect I would have separated out the name change debate from all the other details of the sign. It probably deserved more focus and research.

Glenna Hanley, Past president **Unitarian Fellowship of Fredericton**

9 Sep 2019 robbie.brydon@gmail.com

Specifically on the topic of "[insert city name] Unitarians", I have been fortunate enough to live in two cities with multiple Unitarian congregations - Toronto and Edmonton - where this is not possible. Or at least would not be looked on kindly by smaller congregations if a larger one tried to do it. With that said, "Vancouver Unitarians" is much more easily understandable to someone not in the milieu than "Toronto First". My only reservation with that naming convention in a city with only one congregation is the re-naming that might be required if you ever decided to spin off another congregation, but my inclination is not to hold up a practice that works currently for future hypothetical situations (unless the practice is itself impeding that hypothetical situation).

Best, Robbie (**Toronto and Edmonton**)

9 Sep 2019 lmoffitt659@gmail.com

We call ourselves The **North Shore Unitarian Church**... at this point in time.

In recent years there have been many discussions about this and we have always opted for no change yet.

We have had ongoing hopes and plans to move to another, more accessible location and this name discussion has also been connected to the possible move.....whenever that might happen.

Thanks,

Liz Moffitt

9 Sep 2019 name kept private by request

Hi CUC Leaders



Has anybody investigated the ramifications of dropping "church" from the name?
Are there issues with the charitable / religious status if you became just "Vancouver Unitarians" with no church / congregation / fellowship?

I know that many members of the **Unitarian church of Edmonton** (UCE) would like to change our name to the Unitarian Community of Edmonton (would still be UCE).

The word "church" does carry a lot of baggage. I do wish we could let the whole world know what a lovely home we can offer and that the hateful churches did not get so much publicity. I personally flip flop on the issue of trying to reeducate people into our "different type of religion" and try to reclaim older religious language. Currently I am very much interested in highlighting the difference between credial vs covenantal faith but I am worried that it is an impossible battle to convince the world that there can be a religion that is not based on believing what is prescribed "from above".

I really appreciate all the comments and everybody's hard work to the continued growth of Unitarian Universalism.

Thank you,
(name kept private by request)

9 Sep 2019 frandev66@gmail.com

The Ottawa UU Fellowship also shortened the sign to Unitarian Fellowship. So did Nanaimo.

USC Canada is finally rebranding. Millennials and Gen X and Z had no association with Unitarian. Also, in my cohousing where 6 Unitarians live, all those who are not Unitarian are totally allergic to "church" and are not fooled by "congregation" or "fellowship". Yet otherwise many values in common and strong focus on community and individual identity and mutual respect.

I have no idea where to take this.

Blessings, Frances Deverell

9 Sep 2019 Karen Dunk-Green karen@dunk-green.com

Frances' recent note mentions people not being "fooled by" the terms congregation or fellowship ... which leads me to this comment:

I think that underlying some of the debates mentioned in these notes, there is another challenge issue. Are people coming to UU groups because they want to be part of a religious community (which, I would say, includes valuing things like corporate worship, pastoral care, spiritual development and religious education), or are they coming to us because they want to be part of a social action movement or some other secular activity? The two are not incompatible, but I sense that some of the objections to terminology come from a deeper objection to the purposes of religion. When we reject some of the traditional practices of religion (extreme hierarchy, mandatory creeds, etc.) we don't have to reject religion per se. I think there is a great deal of fuzziness around that distinction and that many people feel the words church, congregation, fellowship, etc. can only take them down the traditional



paths. I admire the work some of our congregations are doing to "reclaim" religious terminology on our own terms, rather than tossing the baby out with the bathwater.

At First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto, we mused about this while evolving our mission and vision statements over the last 3 years. We worried that social action is not enough in the forefront of our current strategic plan and our key statements. So we conducted a survey of our membership (not everyone responded but we got 120 or so) which helped us significantly in understanding why people come to "First". The overwhelming reason why people came to First originally, and the sustained reason why they stay, is to find hope and inspiration. An extremely small number of people said they come to find social action opportunities or partners. To be clear: this is not saying that our members are not engaged in social action! A surprisingly high number work in social justice organizations professionally; many are connected to this work through the vast opportunities our city presents and we're now gathering our volunteers to bring refugee families # 7 and 8 to Canada. Social action activity among our congregants is real. What our survey tells us, though, is that our members come because they actually want religion. They want to hear the ministerial voice, they want the moving music and worship experience, they want a place for intergenerational connection and a place for both children and adults to discover their deepest values. These are the things a religion offers. So our survey led us to put hope and inspiration front and centre in our vision, [First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto Vision and Mission](#) as the enabler of all the good action that comes when they are present. I think this is relevant to the bristling people do about terminology ... it is bristling at the idea of religion, a thing that has been tarnished for so many reasons but survives because it still answers some of our deepest desires.

Karen Dunk-Green **First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto**

9 Sep 2019 Rev Wayne Walder revwayne@live.ca

I have to agree with Karen on this one. We have grown from nothing, based on the idea that inspiration and personal/interpersonal growth are important to our culture.

Meditation, choir, small groups, are all heavily weighted in our community and when we took a poll of why people come I think 75 or so replied that music/meditation/community were the most important reasons for coming. Many of our members are also seriously involved in social action, but they realize they can do that in many other places.

One of beloved members, who works in the social action field, tells us that he comes to the congregation to be refueled and inspired.

We sometimes forget (talking about myself) that leadership, peace, joy, insight, and interpersonal skills are all useful no matter where we use them. They are especially useful in the areas we most want to affect.

We purposely called our congregation "Neighbourhood" because of the baggage associated with religion. But we make no bones about our programming, our Sunday service, and our rationale for existing as a place for spiritual renewal. Our new growth program, 200 Strong, is building the marketing for this approach toward growth.

my 2 cents



Wayne Rev. Wayne Walder, **Ottawa Neighbourhood Unitarian Congregation**

9 Sep 2019 Karen Dunk-Green karen@dunk-green.com

Thanks Wayne, for segueing is into the marketing subject. I'd like to see us all continue to make progress on marketing ourselves as a religion, without shrinking from it but also without scaring away people who need and want what we have to offer yet may not realize that's what a religion built our way can do for them.

9 Sep 2019 Rev. Pat Guthmann Haresch minister@firstunitarianottawa.ca

I am currently at **First Unitarian Congregation in Ottawa**.

I was not here whenever the congregation discussed its name, but anecdotally from some individuals here at First U and in the broader UU conversation, I have had people coil back from the word "church," and others who celebrate that they are finally in the first church where they have ever been accepted. However, I personally haven't heard people recoil from the word "congregation".

Rev. Pat Guthmann Haresch

9 Sep 2019 jprodela@uuma.org

Echoing Karen and Wayne: last year's survey of **Grand River Unitarian Congregation** (Kitchener) shows "community", music, and Sundays being a "battery recharger" as why people attend, and showed that rather than committee work, people want ways to plug into social justice work and events.

Rev. Jessica Purple Rodela

9 Sep 2019 Rev Jessica Purple Rodela jprodela@uuma.org

I shared this with just Mary initially, but since this conversation has "caught fire", perhaps others will find this information helpful:

After moving to Kitchener we changed our name from First Unitarian Congregation of Waterloo to **Grand River Unitarian Congregation**. I can share the article our leader wrote for the CUC about our process for anyone who wants it.

From the start we decided NOT to vote on 'whether or not' to change the name. Instead, we engaged in a 'what if' conversation to explore options, and assured from the start that "DON'T CHANGE THE NAME" would be one of the final options for the vote. We engaged in a series of activities in many different styles of engagement, surveys, art, brainstorming, debate, and conversation, and in stages narrowed down the choices. We held a separate series of votes (for members AND friends) in a session led by Vyda Ng that made the choices between:

Congregation/Church/Fellowship.



Unitarian / Unitarian Universalist.

The final name choices plus "Do not change the name" were voted on at an AGM.

We'd been told that by law the name of our organization needed to explicitly include the TYPE of organization we were (thus: church, congregation, fellowship). **I don't know whether that advice is true or not**, but would be worth looking into such details *before* you start a formal process.

At the same AGM where we voted on the final name option, we also passed a motion to refer to ourselves with the acronym "GRU" (leaving off the "C") to make it formal, so we refer to ourselves accordingly as "Grand River Unitarians".

We found the whole process became a visioning exercise, and though votes for a traditional name prevailed, it proved a really useful experience for us to embark on.

Rev. Jessica Purple Rodela

9 Sep 2019 Luci Dilkus luci.dilkus@gmail.com

I'm enjoying the discussion. Great comments...thank you.

Luci Huronia Unitarian Fellowship

9 Sep 2019 Dina Waik dwaik@rogers.com

Hi all,

Wayne, thanks for ccing me on this discussion. As a Jew, current member of **Neighbourhood UU** Congregation and past member of **Toronto** and **Hamilton** First, I have found myself arguing over the years that the use of the word church in relation to our communities is both misleading and slightly ethnocentric. Church is not a generic word for place of worship (or else we would not need words like temple masjid or synagogue) and connotes a place where Jesus Christ is worshipped. To use it generically as any place of worship may be easy shorthand if you come from a Christian background but is not inclusive of those of us who don't, which is why it is Christian-normative.

Something to think about as we try to grow our communities in as diverse a manner as possible.

Offered warmly as another perspective.

Dina Waik

10 Sep 2019 Amanda Hillenburg treasurer@uestrie.ca

Hi all,

Our legal name is the Unitarian **Universalist Church of North Hatley**, but for the most part we refer to ourselves as **UUEstrie**. "Estrie" is what the Eastern Townships are typically referred to in French. We



changed our affirmation a few years ago to replace the word "church" with the word "community". We often call our group a congregation.

Regards,

Amanda Hillenburg

10 Sep 2019 Marla Thorburn marla.thorburn@outlook.com

Thanks Dina and Wayne for your thoughts and point of view. I am mostly secular Buddhist in my approach to life and find the word "church" raises my hackles even though I try to tame them with thoughts of diversity of beliefs and all being welcome. I also see the problem from a marketing perspective that the typical "hot-button" words for many Unitarians do nothing to attract new members. Rather than embracing those words like church, religion, God, etc., and putting our own spin on them I think it would be wise to consider alternative words. One needs to consider that newcomers don't realise the very broad definition that Unitarians have attached to the use of those words. If a main goal of a congregation is to attract new members, we need to stop driving them away with our misleading language, IMHO (in my humble opinion).

On a side note, I think this also applies to the use of acronyms at Sunday services. Our Sunday services are open to the public and it is not welcoming to be subjected to a secret language of acronyms that would require a cheat sheet to understand. Please keep the acronyms confined to committee meetings and computer file names.

I am pleased to see language, names and marketing being addressed in this forum. I am a prior board member, but my marketing experience comes from running a sign business for many years. No one would put their acronym on their sign, since it doesn't convey any information, except to insiders. Following this train of thought, what does the word "Church" or "Fellowship" convey to the public? The distinction of a Fellowship being lay-lead and a church having a minister is rather esoteric. Dropping that all together in favour of <place name> Unitarians makes sense to me.

Marla Thorburn, **Nanaimo, BC**

10 Sep 2019 Rev Andy Blair ahblair@yahoo.com

Hello Marla et al,

"I also see the problem from a marketing perspective that the typical "hot-button" words for many Unitarians do nothing to attract new members. Rather than embracing those words like church, religion, God, etc., and putting our own spin on them I think it would be wise to consider alternative words. One needs to consider that newcomers don't realise the very broad definition that Unitarians have attached to the use of those words."

Bingo.

Indeed, for many years (largely influenced by UUA leadership, and Ministers) there has been a concerted push within UUism towards *more* religious language, not less. This was termed by UUA



President Sinkford a "[language of reverence](#)." [KW Note: The linked article is from the UU Humanist website and was written in 2014 by Maria Greene titled "Away from the language of reverence".]

I understand where part of this was coming from: in the United States, where evangelical and conservative Christians have tended to monopolize public discourse when it comes to religion (and religion's very significant influence on public square and policies there), this was a concerted effort to reclaim religious language in the public square. To not let the religious right define what it means to be religious, and the language. Fair enough.

Whether the effort has worked or not (it seems not, if the current situation in the USA is any evidence) the project has little context in Canada, where the religious and political environment is very different. In my view the religious language - giving us the appearance of Protestant Christianity, whether this effect was deliberate or not - has been a barrier to entry for many who would otherwise consider us:

[A New Language of Openness: Less God-talk for Canadian UUs? Canadian Unitarian, Spring 2017.](#)

The word 'church' merely compounds this, and obscures from the public what we're all about today. Some of the low hanging fruit of our 'target audience' - younger people (aged 18-39, who tend to be less religious, [especially in Canada](#)) and 'refugees' leaving other religions - are not likely to be impressed by our old-school Protestant Christian language.

No-one is calling for censorship or banishment of religious terms, but to put them on the welcome mat, as calling oneself a 'church' would seem to do, is leading with the wrong foot.

Rev Andy Blair, *Universalist Unitarian Church of Halifax*

10 Sep 2019 marla.thorburn@outlook.com

Hi Andy. I enjoyed the article you wrote a couple of years ago. I actually saved a copy of it on my computer so I wouldn't lose it. Thanks for sharing again.

I found this interesting survey from a few years ago. It is American, but still is relevant. The comment string makes for interesting reading.

<http://huumanists.org/poll/religious-language> [UU Humanist Association website, Mar 2014]

10 Sep 2019 robbie.brydon@gmail.com

Hi Andy,

When thinking about your "target audience" of young people, you may want to consider youth who grew up in the faith. I would say that much of the "low hanging fruit" are people already in our congregations who we're not doing a good enough job retaining. My experience of UU youth and young adult communities has been that religious language is more prevalent and more important to some participants than in your typical congregation.



It's an uneasy tension among people who want different things and come from different backgrounds, some of them religiously traumatic. The Weaving Our Worship series about 15 years ago had a whole section on religious language and how we use it (or not) in 'church'.

Robbie

10 Sep 2019 nreynolds@shaw.ca

Wow! This conversation took awhile to gather steam but it has become incredibly relevant to where the CUC could look to reinvigorate our congregations in the twenty-first century. I see some incredible community building work going on that would be inspiring and inviting to many but the rigid lines of an identity that was relevant centuries ago really puts a low hanging ceiling on where our congregations can go and who they can attract. How can we possibly be convincing about being relevant to the Twenty first century when our very name implies an over worked, wornout, irrelevant argument about how many gods there are? Name is not enough, but it is essential in describing who we are, what we offer and why we are relevant. If it can't do that, it isn't working for us. I don't have a suggestion but it seems to me the name should incorporate *welcome, people, planet, community*. Perhaps what we need is a strong name with an easy/moving tagline. For instance my son's boxing club is called *contenders* and the tag line is *Always in your corner*. Who isn't going to be informed and moved by that? Of course he has to back it up with efforts that reinforce the message. But I think that we have most of the efforts that it takes to be a widely participated in community. We need the name and tag line to bring an immediate, knowing response. For instance (as a place to start from not an end at) World Community—sustaining our Earth and all its peoples.

Since my thoughts are engaged in imaging a brighter future for our spiritual community let me add, aside, we need to look at what works and build on that rather than go back to ways of doing things that just get by. In our fellowship whenever we have a speaker with a dynamic message throngs come out. When we hold a Pete Seeger evening our large sanctuary is standing room only. But when we just get by with going through the motions attendance flags. What we need to jump attendance and relevance and income is a CUC speakers/ musicians bureau of powerful presenters with strong, soul shaking, focused messages relevant to sustaining people and planet in the Twenty first Century.

Happy Trails!

Norm

11 Sep 2019 Glenna Hanley ghanley@nb.sympatico.ca

It would be helpful if people would say what congregation/fellowship/faith community/ church/spiritual group/ etc. they are from. **PLEASE**. I, for one, do not know every Unitarian/ Universalist/ Unitarian Universalist/ Universalist/ Unitarian in Canada by their first name.

Glenna Hanley

Unitarian Fellowship of **Fredericton** (also recently known as the Unitarian Congregation)



11 Sep 2019 Rev Wayne Walder revwayne@live.ca

Hi all,

I'm shy about writing this, yet it touches a significant part of what I have done in ministry over the last 20 years. Our name(s) might be only the tip of a rather difficult iceberg for us to see. We need ways to be noticed in this new century. We want people to come and help us change the world. We want to "build a new way" because we see that the old ways are not working. Yet we all inwardly know that its going to take a lot more than a new name. Our "Name", needs to be combined with a significant marketing campaign to make any difference. And... any marketing campaign needs to lean on a culture of growing committed, serving and insightful people, when many of our congregations are aging, tired and confused. This is quite a tall order.

We need a symposium, a leadership retreat for our UU country, a deep conversation supported by resources, so we can change our trajectory over this next decade.

There have been attempts to do this but there wasn't enough need. Maybe now?

It is possible to grow a new spiritual community (presence) in the 21st century. In the last 20 years we have taken \$50 and 5 folks and leveraged them to create a new congregation that owns its own building in Toronto and is on its way to 200 members. We are not that different from any other congregation. But we have taken some chances and offered leadership that was not deterred by the past or our fear. There are several congregations quietly doing this right now.

Can we do this together? I do not know.

Wayne Rev. Wayne Walder **Ottawa** Neighbourhood Unitarian Congregation

11 Sep 2019 Joan Carolyn joan@cuc.ca

Good Morning All!

At least it's still morning for me. Warm greetings to all of you from your **CUC Congregation Life Team** Leads and thank you for the ideas, passions and questions raised by this conversation. My colleague, Rev. Linda Thomson and I follow these conversations with care as one way in which to keep some tabs on concerns of importance to Canadian UUs. At this point I wanted you to be aware that I'm noting these ideas and will be meeting with Linda next week to discuss how we might respond, once she has returned to work following a family memorial.

Peace & gratitude for this conversation and I will note additional ideas as they come in.

Joan



11 Sep 2019 Vyda Ng vyda@cuc.ca

What an interesting, fascinating discussion! Thank you, Mary Bennett, for sparking the conversation.

I, and other staff, will be keeping track of this conversation, as it's got such rich ideas and perspectives. Who knows what could come of it??

Recently, I was talking with Anne Bokma from the Hamilton congregation. She has a new book coming out from publisher Douglas & McIntyre this fall called *My Year of Living Spiritually: From Woo-Woo to Wonderful—One Woman's Secular Search for a More Soulful Life*. The book documents the rise of the "spiritual-but-not-religious" demographic, Anne's experience trying more than 20 different spiritual practices and her spiritual journey from religious fundamentalism to Unitarianism. More information is at [Anne's website](#), where she answers questions honestly. I think this will resonate with many of us, and is a bit more perspective to add to the conversation.

What do UUs offer the SBNR (spiritual but not religious)?

Vyda Ng

11 Sep 2019 Sandy Chism

I wonder if it is the tax system that is keeping us a religion rather than a spiritual group?

12 Sep 2019 marla.thorburn@outlook.com

Good question. Are Buddhist groups considered religious groups for tax purposes? I think a Taoist Tai Chi group I belonged to was a registered charity, but fees for classes did not qualify for tax receipts.

Marla Thorburn, Comox

12 Sep 2019 minister@firstunitarianottawa.ca

“What do UUs offer the SBNR (spiritual but not religious)?”

- These days, I think most of our UU settings are the spiritual home for the SBNR whether they have found us or not. So the question as we see in this whole thread, is how to let them know we're out there for them.

Rev. Pat Guthmann Haresch, Developmental Minister, First Unitarian Congregation of **Ottawa**

12 Sep 2019 name kept private by request

"... how to let them know we're out there for them?"

I think that this is a very important question that does not get enough attention!



12 Sep 2019 Andy Blair

Hello

> *"These days, I think most of our UU settings are the spiritual home for the SBNR whether they have found us or not. So the question as we see in this whole thread, is how to let them know we're out there for them."*

I agree with you here.

I believe that one reason they have not found us is that (intentionally or not) we disguise ourselves as another Protestant Christian denomination, and thus most SBNRs never even consider us as an option.

To an outsider, who isn't into/has been turned off traditional religion but is seeking community or spirituality, visiting a UU "church" to hear a "sermon" from a "minister" and sing "hymns" mentioning "God" on Sunday will all seem more than a little like the Protestant church down the street. It takes a few repeat visits to learn to 'read between the lines' and dig deeper to discover the difference...most people never get that far.

Andy Blair **Halifax**, Canada

12 Sep 2019 Bill Woolverton

Or a few succinct questions with satisfactory answers. The tension between theists and non-theists is a feature of UUism and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. Some of the people most turned off by religious language are those who have come from a less than satisfactory religious experience and have been negatively affected by it. I would say that not only are some of us SBNR, but we have also different definitions of spiritual and religious. As someone said, it is not only what we call the places we meet, and our religious "trappings", but what we call ourselves as Unitarians or Unitarian Universalists.

Bill

