



The Newsletter of the Unitarian Fellowship of Fredericton

874 York Street, Fredericton, N.B., E3B 3R8 (506) 451-0919

Sunday Service 11 a.m.

Web Site: <http://www.uff.ca>

Email: tuff@nbnet.nb.ca

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December 30 “*In the Spirit of Janus*” Anne-Louise Brookes will facilitate the service. As Janus looked simultaneously ahead to the new year and back to the old, Anne-Louise will facilitate a circle discussion in the spirit of Janus.

January 6 “*Promises and Possibilities: Universalism in World Religions*” Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes will lead the service: What would the world be like if everyone believed that people of all beliefs were united in their goodness, and all were deserving of love and grace? Universalists are more than the other U in U*U; people who define themselves as Universalists also belong to several denominations of Christianity and other religions. In this service, I’ll be exploring how universalism is defined by Quaker, Jewish, Independent, and other Universalists.



Sunday Services

December 2 “*In Memory of Women Engineers*” Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes will lead a service in memory of the victims of the cole Polytechnique tragedy of December 6, 1989 and violence against women in general.

December 9 “*Living with Ability*” Sharon van Abbema will speak on Dec 9 on Living with Ability. What can an active person do when a change in health presents obstacles? Disability, possibility, opportunity are the operative words.

December 16 “*Advent: Expect More Waiting / Wait More Expectantly*” the reverend Ray Drennan will conduct the service. Most of us are not very good at waiting yet during the season of Advent the Christian Tradition encourages us to do just that: to wait. Might waiting become for us a rich spiritual discipline?

December 23 “*Yule/Christmas/Chanukkah*” Intergenerational Solstice Festival Service in various traditions.



Season's Greetings



In whatever tradition you choose to celebrate (or not) may the Spirit (Lord, Goddess, Deity(ies), Ø, or whatever(s) of choice) bless your Solstice festival!



Letter to the Editor

I’m writing to add my voice to Joy Belyea’s and any others who objected to some of the sing song selections at the gala dinner on Nov. 28th.

I have a pretty good sense of humour, but the song “God Rest Ye Unitarians” is offensive on a number of levels. Of course we know Christ wasn’t born on Christmas Day. All hail Reason & Fact. But, the Facts do point to the existence of an historic Christ. That his presence on earth had a significant impact on the course of history, good or bad, is indisputable. Is there a Reason we should ridicule

Christian mythology? I'd hate to see what we would do to the Bhagavad Gita. "Hold onto your hats Hindus, you silly people. Here come the Unitarians armed with Reason & Fact."

If Reason & Fact were to prevail, who would believe in Santa Clause? I'd refer you to the "Yes, Virginia" editorial if you are a naysayer. Or just ask me. I've seen him with my own eyes and through the eyes of my children. Most parents have.

If we are to elevate Reason & Fact above all else, what does that leave for us who are both Unitarian and spiritual? Why do we light a chalice at the beginning of Sunday Service? We don't need the light or the heat, so what's the point? Why do we even gather? It defies Reason that we make our way to a building on York Street on Sunday morning to sit upright on chairs and listen to different points of view. Why not sit home in our easy chairs and listen to pod casts of Ideas or Tapestry on CBC Radio if we want something to stimulate critical thinking.

I'm just about finished, but not quite.

Some of the little jingles in the Wednesday night handout were kind of funny, but I draw the line at: "Let us worship Aphrodite, she sure is cute and she is mighty. She doesn't wear a nightie, and that's good enough for me." Where did we find that one? In a stall in the little boys room at one of the middle schools. I suppose it's a real thigh slapper.....if you're 12.

Don't get me wrong. I'm all in favour of us poking fun at ourselves and I love edginess, but looked at objectively, it isn't really very funny. I brought the song sheet home and have kept it well-hidden from the eyes of my housemate, Megan. She is a great kid and identifies strongly as a Christian. I would be embarrassed for all of us if she were to read something in which Unitarians come across, on the face of it, as a narrow minded, literal thinking, puerile group of iconoclasts. If I wanted to sing songs that disrespect women or lack tolerance for other people's religious views, I would likely join Smythe Street Cathedral. If nothing else, they have better parking.

So that's it. When Joy first objected, I kind of rolled my eyes. It seemed to put a damper on the party. But, the more I thought about it, the more I was happy she had spoken up. It sure got my attention and forced me to acknowledge my own discomfort around the lyrics. I hope we've seen the last of these. Call me crazy, but I'm still holding out against the overwhelming evidence presented by Reason & Fact that would lead me to be cynical about Christmas. It's just that I want to be ready for that moment when I get to see Santa Clause again. This time, god willing, through the eyes of my grandchildren.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison Brewer



Letter to the Editor

Thank you Allison B for putting your thoughts into such good order. Joy's speaking out has made us all stop and think. In fact, the damper on the evening was perhaps useful, as is your letter.

We don't always get things right, that's for sure. I know that we have sung these songs before, and, it seems now to be the time to pay more attention to the words and to the way they might be received. I am glad Joy provoked that scrutiny

What Joy said to me later at the table was that when we sing songs that make us U*Us feel good being together, that's way more fun than poking fun at others—which some people feel some of these songs did in a hurtful way.

It seems to me that we could, in the future, craft evenings (and gatherings) that include singing songs that celebrate U*Uism, without including songs that are felt by some to ridicule others.

Thanks to all, really.

Merci, and take care.
allison



Adult Programs

The Fellowship offers many programs, sometimes filling up the building six or seven days a week! Members and friends play bridge, meet in small groups, have stimulating discussions, have potlucks, support each other spiritually... Several more programs for adults of all ages are being planned for the New Year. They include:

- A series of workshops on "Healthy Congregations" offered by the Canadian Unitarian Council and led by a Service Consultant. These workshops will take place on three weekends (dates to be determined) between January and April, 2008. Please look for information in the future; we'll include it in Orders of Service and newsletters.
- A visit by Rev. Kitsy Winthrop in February 2008. Rev. Kitsy will be leading workshops and offering pastoral care. We are very grateful for her help and involvement in our Fellowship, and look forward to her visit. We'll send news about her plans and what has become known as her "dance card" over the next couple of months.
- In collaboration with the Social Responsibility Committee, we will be featuring a screening and a presentation on The Inconvenient Truth in early Febru-

ary. Carl Duivenvoorden, one of just 21 Canadians trained by Al Gore to deliver the presentation, will be speaking at 7:00 on February 7, 2008. The presentation can also be enjoyed as part of the Discussion Group Potluck Package: just bring your appetite and a little something to sustain us at around 6 p.m.

<http://inconvenienttruth.changeyourcorner.com/schedule.php>

- I am (still) planning to do a program on “The Language of Reverence”, most likely in March 2008, and we may be offering a workshop dealing with end of life issues and memorials in the spring, as well. While everything is still a work-in-progress, the Adult Programs Committee members are enthused about our vital and well-rounded activities, all these ways we have of coming together and being (a) whole.

Blesséd be,
Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes
Chair, Adult Programs Committee



Small Group Ministry Program

Are you looking for a way to form authentic connections with others and build an even better community?

Do you enjoy discussion about a wide range of spiritual topics?

In Small Ministry Groups...

— we build the bonds of community, developing a deeper sense of belong and just having the fun of being in fellowship with one another.


— we have an opportunity for deep spiritual exploration and transformation by discussing a variety of topics about the ultimate questions of life. They can be life affirming and even transformative.

— we explore our reflections in a respectful, positive and supportive environment.

— we practise our U*U principles and our ideas about right relations with one another and the world, and nurture shared leadership.


Since spring 2006, the Unitarian Fellowship of Fredericton has offered an engaging and inspiring program of Small Group Ministry. As the 2007 year comes to an end, we are opening our doors and inviting members of the Fellowship to join the program. Flyers providing information about our Small Groups are available on the table in the main floor hall. All those who are currently attending a Small Group or who are interested in joining one are asked to fill out the form in the flyer and leave it in the SGM box on the hall table or return it to Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the program can contact the Small Group Ministry Coordinator, Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes, at elder@nb.sympatico.ca.



Joyful Noises Director

The Joyful Noises choir is searching for a new director. Is there anyone at the Fellowship who would be interested in this position? If so, please contact either Linda (452-0982) or Margaret (454-5319).



Lets Make the Minimal Effort, Please

For whatever reason, I'm often one of the first people in the Fellowship on a Sunday morning, so do some of the set up for service; and, because it is not especially inconvenient for me, I usually stop in on the way to work to wheel the garbage dolly out to the street on Wednesday morning.

In those two efforts to help our Fellowship run a little more smoothly, I have made several observations:

- On one Sunday, I noticed all of the thermostats were turned off. All building users are advised to check what is written on each thermostat and set accordingly. Even in the summer, a thermostat will not turn the heat on unless the temperature actually drops below the set point and if it gets that cold, the heating should be allowed to come on. The buildings and grounds committee have done a lot of work to figure out the optimal setting of each thermostat and which doors should be open or closed to minimize energy consumption while avoiding damage from an overly cooled building. The temperature in the “choir loft” is advised so that the piano will not suffer serious temperature fluctuations which could damage it.
- The big blue recycling container outside is only for paper. I have noticed on occasion green garbage bags sticking out from under the lid and when I checked, they contained plastic items, not paper. I put them in with the garbage. Please do not create extra work for others. Please use the recycling dolly correctly as our continued access to this service is dependent on our using it correctly. The acceptable items are posted in the kitchen.
- Often when I return home late in the afternoon, I will see the dolly out by the street even though there may be lots of cars by the Fellowship. There is no rule that says people are not permitted to wheel the bar-

rel back in and anyone using the Fellowship should feel privileged to do what little they can to help with the running. Although I can put the green barrell out on my way to work, it is not always convenient for me to put it back in the afternoon. The empty dolly is not particularly difficult to wheel back in.

Small things can often make a big difference. Help to reduce the work that other volunteers have to do when you don't do your share. If you see someone setting the thermostats incorrectly, please remind them that the recommended settings are for a good reason. Thanks everyone.

In fellowship
Tony Fitzgerald



UUCSJ Newsletter Available

The full internet web page of the UUC of Saint John can be found at the address:

<http://www.uucsj.org/>

The monthly newsletters are available from a link near the left side of the top row of links.



“Renounce and Enjoy” - Unitarians Say

Editor's Note: a little late, but possibly of interest

Unitarians across Canada are taking a day off on November 23 from spending, to observe Buy Nothing Day. The Canadian Unitarian Council encourages congregation members across Canada not to handle money on that day, but to spend some time asking themselves, “How much is enough?”

“Unitarians covenant to affirm and promote the interdependent web of existence,” said Jean Pfeiderer, president of the CUC. “We can achieve this by living simply, and by curbing the urge to spend and consume more than we need.”

Unitarians work towards a more sustainable world through various projects, including Green Sanctuary programs in their churches and fellowship halls. Buy Nothing Day provides a chance to join with environmentalists and consumers' groups globally

“We believe in world community,” said Pfeiderer. “We also believe that we cannot shop our way to fulfillment. We encourage people to ask themselves every day, ‘Why do I want to own this?’ We think people are trying to fill spiritual needs by accumulating possessions, when what

they really want is fellowship.”

Between Buy Nothing Day and New Year's Day, many Unitarian congregations will offer fellowship through community gatherings, workshops and worship services. Some of these events illustrate Unitarians' Christian roots and long-standing commitment to social responsibility, such as “Unplug Christmas” and “Simple Christmas” workshops; “Blue Christmas” events where people can talk about the downside of the holidays; and collecting and distributing hampers for those less fortunate than themselves.

Buy Nothing Day kicks off the Unitarian winter holiday season with a reminder that true gifts come from the heart, not the store. “We are urging Unitarians to buy less,” said Jean Pfeiderer, “and live more. Gandhi once summed up his philosophy as ‘Renounce and enjoy’. If we take the focus off spending, we can see other aspects of life more clearly.”

The Canadian Unitarian Council was the first national faith group ever to endorse Buy Nothing Day, urging the 18,500 Unitarians in Canada to stay out of the stores and malls on that day. The CUC hopes that other faith communities will follow its lead, by endorsing Buy Nothing Day, and encouraging their own members to give their loved ones the greatest gift of all: their time and full attention.

The Canadian Unitarian Council/Conseil Unitarien du Canada (CUC) is an association of forty-five congregations located across Canada with 5,200 individual members. Arising out of the work of outspoken reformers and dissenters within the Christian tradition five centuries ago, the Unitarian movement today includes Universalists and flows in a broad religious stream augmented by Humanist, earth-centered, Buddhist and other progressive beliefs.

For more information, contact:

Rev. Wendy McNiven,
wmcniven@uniserve.com
(250) 860 - 5171
Minister, UUF of Kamloops, BC
Member, CUC Environment Monitoring Group



Montréal Church Officially Renamed

It's official! We are now legally named the Unitarian Church of Montreal, and in French, Église unitarienne de Montréal. I have posted a copy of the official certificate from the Quebec Registrar on the board bulletin board by the kitchen in Phoenix Hall. After 149 years with the name Church of the Messiah, and after several years of discussion about changing it, the final paperwork to make it official felt quite mundane. But as I popped the envelope into the mailbox there was a great sense of completion.

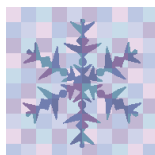
Our history as the Church of the Messiah will not be for-

gotten however. Thanks to the diligent work of the wardens under Mary Bassett's stewardship, the huge bronze commemorative plaque (which Diane spoke of in a recent sermon) "Presented to the Church of the Messiah by the representatives of the United States of America... to commemorate the first meeting of the conference on British soil..." is now beautifully restored and will have a home in the choir alcove of the Sanctuary. Thank you to Serge Belet, Aurelien Guillory, David Rollert, Tara Bissett and Mary Bassett for their collective aesthetic eye and recommendations on the appropriate setting for this piece of our history. In the Administration level foyer and the Thomas Room there are several historic photos and documents to keep us connected to our past. Be sure to stop and take a look.



Church of the Larger Fellowship

Celebrate
Winter



Celebrate winter at the Church of the Larger Fellowship's Gift Shop. Our gift shop sells seasonal note cards. Proceeds from our CLF Shop support the many UU ministries of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, serving UU individuals and small groups all over the world.



Purchase online at www.clfuu.org or call 617-948-6150.

The Church of the Larger Fellowship's mission is to provide a ministry to isolated religious liberals, promote the understanding and growth of Unitarian Universalism and institute programs to that end. Learn more about the CLF at www.clfuu.org.



Message from Mary

Global Connections

As we move toward December and its focus on Peace and Joy in the world, it's fitting to be thinking about worldwide Unitarian and Universalist connections.

In early November, Rev. Brian Kiely, minister of the Unitarian Church of Edmonton and a past CUC board member was elected as President of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists. Our news release is posted at: http://cuc.ca/whats_new/announcements.htm

CUC, along with the US-based UUA, the British General Assembly, the Unitarian Church in Transylvanian (Hungary and Romania) and the Indian Council of Unitarian Churches are given two delegates each, as the five largest groups. The other members: South Africa, Nigeria, Spain, Germany, Denmark, Finland, European Unitarian Universalists, Czech Republic, Australia & New Zealand, Philippines and new member Indonesia have one delegate each. Participants from Italy, France, Mexico, Bolivia, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and Argentina also attended.

You can see all the member groups at www.icuu.net along with some other great resources including a curriculum on the Garden of Unitarian Universalism (free download) and the collection of the monthly Global Chalice Lightings - which CUC through Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes and Lucie-Marie Castonguay-Bower translate into French.

I went on from the ICUU meeting in Germany to spend a few days in Prague staying in an apartment in the building owned by the church, right in the middle of the tourist area. Photos of Norbert Capek, founder of the Czech Unitarian Church and creator of the Flower Communion, were everywhere. They have a stained glass window with the letter U and sunflowers that is the same as the embroidery he had on his robe. I had tea with members of the congregation to talk about Unitarianism in Canada and hear their stories.

Then on to England, where I met with new Chief Executive, Rev. Steve Dick to explore ways in which Britain and Canada might collaborate. The British group recently completed a "consistent identity" project with a logo-redesign and templates for web-sites and newsletters for congregations, and I was interested in hearing the results. The headquarters website was redesigned and all of their materials now bear the new look. Congregations are also beginning to use the new look. Steve will be attending our Annual Conference and Meeting in May.

Joyce Ashworth, Vice-President of the GA, has been very involved in leading congregational workshops and working with others to create materials such as the binder, "Help Is at Hand"—a resource book for congregational trustees. They decided not to just give out the binders, but ar-

range a launch in various areas so that people would learn how to use it and get clarification of the material before receiving it. British GA began a Congregational Assessment Program a few years ago, originally focused on small congregations. Joyce and I are both hoping that she'll be able to attend our conference and share these materials with Canadians.

Britain has about the same number of individual members as we do in Canada (5-6000) but about five times as many congregations. Many of their professional ministers serve two—or more—congregations. They have launched the "Future Ministry" commission to look at their ministry needs over the coming years, as they currently have a shortage and anticipating a greater gap as many ministers will be retiring over the next few years. We hope to arrange a panel at the CUC conference on Shared and Professional Ministry and share our hopes, dreams, needs and concerns.

NEW TO UU – BOOKS

I was given a copy of the new book, *The Larger View—Unitarians and World Religions* by Rev. Dr. Vernon Marshall published by The Lindsey Press. For those interested in Unitarians role in multifaith gatherings and initiatives, you'd find it quite thought-provoking.

The ICUU has published the proceedings of the second theological symposium: *The Home We Share: Globalization, Post-Modernism and Unitarian / Universalist Theology*. Each copy is \$23 plus \$9 shipping. See below for more details.

PRESS RELEASE Contact: People's Church office@peopleschurch.net 269-375-3262

THE HOME WE SHARE: Globalization, Post-Modernism and Unitarian / Universalist Theology

Proceedings of the 2nd Theological Symposium International Council of Unitarians and Universalists

Foreword by István Kovács Edited by Clifford M. Reed & Jill K. McAllister 433 pages with appendices, bibliographic notes and index

Canadians featured in the Kolozsvár, Transylvania, Symposium during July 2006, were Kathy Sage (Kingston), Katie Stein Sather and Phillip Hewett (British Columbia). They were among participants from six continents who considered how UU theology and liturgy could respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by globalization and post-modernism.

UU ideas about radical intellectual freedom and challenge to rigid orthodoxies pose uncomfortable questions about our own liberal religious assumptions and certainties. In closing the Symposium, participants affirmed the unity of all existence and committed themselves to religious freedom, diversity, social justice and covenantal relationships.

Each softcover copy is \$23 U.S. Shipping single copies costs

an additional \$9. For multiple copies, email the church office (see above right) because shipping cost is dependent on distance. VISA and MasterCard credit card orders accepted and encouraged to make the Canadian-U.S. dollar conversion a non-problem. Checks are payable to ICUU Publications. Mail orders and payment to:

ICUU Publications
c/o People's Church, 1758 N. Tenth St.
Kalamazoo, MI 49009 USA

SHORT SNIPPETS

Are You a Friend of the CUC? Friends donate close approximately seven per cent of our revenue. What would we do without our friends? If you can contribute, you'll see more information at www.cuc.ca/friends or contact any CUC board or staff member.

CUC Annual Conference & Meeting - May 16-19, 2008 - Algonquin College, Ottawa The overall schedule and information about preconference events, keynote speakers and accommodation have been posted at cuc.ca/conference/2008. Concurrent sessions and registration forms will be posted in the new year. Questions? Contact acm@cuc.ca

International Unitarians and Universalists. There are lots of ways to learn about Unitarians and Universalists around the world. Go to the website: icuu.net. Join the announce-only email group by sending a blank note to icuu-news-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. Check out the facebook group International Council of Unitarians and Universalists.



"The swamp at Unicamp is a special spot for our family. We watched the Spotted Sandpipers' tipsy walking, seemingly on water—proving that birds too can be illusionists (walking on aquatic plants). The kingfishers called to each other. And the Green Frogs went 'doy-oy-oy-oing, doy-oy-oy-oing, doy-oy-oy-oing.'" -Paul, Nancy and Aaron

Want to work at camp next summer? All positions are currently open! Stay tuned for more info in Unicamp's Fall Newsletter.

Questions or comments? Contact scumbost@uoguelph.ca or for further info visit us online at www.unicampofontario.ca



The reverend Brian Kiely Elected to Head ICUU

Representatives from 27 countries have elected the Reverend Brian Kiely of Edmonton as President of the International Council of Unitarians and-Universalists. Reverend Kiely previously served as President and Past President of the Canadian Unitarian Council until May 2007.

In the first week of November, Unitarians and Universalists from around the world gathered in Oberwesel, Germany, overlooking the banks of the Rhine river. Following their liberal religious faith's inclination towards voluntary simplicity, they met in a youth hostel, not a cathedral. Nor did they pollute the air with black smoke or white smoke as they burned their ballots. In fact, they elected Rev. Kiely by acclamation.

Unitarian and Universalist organizations tend to build from the grassroots up, rather than being directed from the top down. Although the faith traces its roots to the Protestant Reformation of 1450, and has centuries of tradition in England and New England, its emphasis on democracy and self-determination works against monolithic policymaking structures.

There are about 18,000 Unitarians in Canada (who may or may not be affiliated with one of the 45 active congregations) and more than 1,000 Unitarian Universalist congregations in the US. In addition, groups from as far as India and Africa have discovered Unitarianism for themselves, often through the Internet.

Governing Unitarians has been compared to herding cats. Rev. Kiely, who previously served several years on the Canadian Unitarian Council Board (including two terms as President), has experience with leading a flock composed of people who prize independence and diversity. Promoting the individual's "free and responsible search for truth and meaning" is one of the seven Unitarian principles.

Rev. Kiely describes himself as a "theistic humanist", meaning he has a deep sense of the spirit and of the divine, but that he does not believe in a god that watches over us or that intervenes in our lives. He says, "We must rely on our human abilities to solve our own problems, and develop strong, trusting and supportive communities to help us along the way."

Current CUC president Jean Pfeleiderer noted that the growing global interest in Unitarian philosophy reflects the faith's relevance to world affairs and an awareness that "the fostering of the individual's spiritual path is more important than ever in the twenty-first century."

She also pointed to Unitarian leadership in the environmental movement, notably the Green Sanctuary movement and the organization, Ministry for the Earth.

Rev. Kiely's election brings a Canadian perspective to the development of the world Unitarian movement. He will play an important role in preserving what Unitarians call "the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are all a part."

The Canadian Unitarian Council/conseil unitarien du Canada (CUC) is an association of forty-five congregations located across Canada with 5,200 individual members. Arising out of the work of outspoken reformers and dissenters within the Christian tradition five centuries ago, the Unitarian movement today flows in a broad religious stream augmented by Humanist, Earth-centred, Buddhist and other progressive beliefs.



The Alban Institute - Conflicts of Interest

by Dan Hotchkiss

"Conflict of interest" is an ugly phrase, but it's time to say it, lay it on the table, and deal with it as a normal part of life. Everybody who is not a hermit manages conflicting interests all the time. Congregations' awkwardness and silence on the subject only makes us vulnerable.

Many congregations accept practices that in other contexts we would question. For example, when the driveway needs re-topping, why deal with someone we don't know when good old Tom of Tom's Blacktop sits right here at the board table? We know he'll give us a good price (don't we?). In any case, if we suddenly quit using him, he'd be upset.

No doubt he would, but we are living in a changed world, where in some ways the corporate and legal standard of good stewardship exceeds the common practice in religious institutions. If anything, the reverse should be the case. The scriptures are full of stories and admonitions about how to handle the "trustee" role, from Jesus's parables about good, bad, and indifferent stewards back to Cain's wrong answer to God's question about Abel. We are our brother's keeper, but in congregations we keep and manage property and money that our brothers and sisters have entrusted to us-not for our own benefit but for a higher purpose.

The governing board controls but does not own the congregation or its property. Neither do the donors or the members. The "owner" of a congregation is its mission; the board controls the property for one exclusive purpose: to fulfill the mission. When board members vote, they represent neither themselves nor the members who voted them into office. Instead, they are trustees whose duty is to vote the interest of their beneficiary, and their beneficiary is the mission.

Unfortunately, board members often think of the congre-

gation as a collection of individuals whose preferences are paramount. They assume their duty is to represent the interests or opinions of the members who elected them. Actually, as trustees, they owe a “duty of loyalty,” which means they must vote in behalf of the real owner—the congregation’s mission—even if that goes against the private interest of any individual or group. (An interesting corollary is that when congregations meet, their members also are trustees. When private interests or preferences conflict with the congregation’s mission, a member’s duty also is to vote the mission.)

The most obvious conflicts come up when, as in the case of Tom the blacktop man, the board considers transferring the congregation’s money to a board member. Such conflicts also happen when a board member applies for a paid position on the congregation’s staff, or offers a computer for the office at a “reduced” price.

Clear conflicts arise when a board action benefits the spouse or child of a board member. When family of board members serve in paid staff roles, potential conflicts come up whenever the board acts on salaries or budgets.

When a board member serves on two nonprofit boards that deal with one another, yet another type of conflict can arise. Probably the most common case of this is where a congregation rents space to a nonprofit school or social agency and one person serves on both boards. Here the conflict is between two charitable missions—which may be compatible but not identical. As these examples show, you don’t have to be selfish to have a conflict of interest!

Any time an upcoming agenda item raises a conflict of interest for a board member (or, I would add, a congregation member), the minimum requirement is that the conflicting interest be disclosed and noted in the minutes. If the conflict is substantial, the board member should refrain from voting. Fastidious board members will absent themselves whenever the board talks about a matter in which they have a personal stake. In any case, it is important that the remaining members of the board ensure that its decision reflects the interest of the congregation (that is to say, its mission) independent of the interests of individuals.

Instead of waiting for an awkward issue to arise, the best way to address conflicts of interest is proactively. A written policy on conflicts of interest should apply to anyone who acts for the congregation, including board and committee members, staff members, volunteers, and even ordinary members when they vote at meetings. The policy should require the following:

— Annual disclosure by board members and senior staff of any interest they or close family members have in companies the congregation deals with, including stock own-

ership, employment, or other significant business dealings. The disclosure form should require a listing of other nonprofit board memberships.

— Immediate disclosure of any additional conflicts of interest when an item of business comes before a board or staff meeting. Where a member has a conflict, he or she should leave the room while the matter is discussed and voted on, and the minutes should reflect this.

— Competitive bids on contracts or purchases over a certain dollar amount, with written documentation of the bidding process. If a vendor who is related to a staff or board member gets the business, the documentation will help show how this was in the interest of the congregation.

All minutes, conflict of interest forms, and competitive bidding records should be available to interested members of the congregation.

In addition, congregations need a policy on nepotism—including hiring staff members who are related to each other or to board members. Certainly, no board member should participate in debate or voting on the hiring, evaluation, or dismissal of a spouse or close relative. It should go without saying (but unfortunately doesn’t) that a staff member who runs for a board position is creating a huge conflict of interest. With the possible exception of the top clergy leader, who in some polities must serve on or chair the governing board, this practice is best prohibited.

Everybody in a congregation, especially a small one, has multiple relationships with others. That is part of the power of congregations to touch and transform people in all aspects of their lives. But if conflicts of interest are not managed openly and well, it can also be a major source of conflict, liability, and—worst of all—failure to exercise the kind of moral influence a congregation can and ought to have.

Dan Hotchkiss is a senior consultant at the Alban Institute. “Conflicts of Interest” originally appeared in the September 2007 issue of *Clergy Journal* (www.logosproductions.com) and is reprinted with permission.

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