

# First-time delegates: what they found

*Why do Unitarians and Universalists first go to a cuc annual conference and meeting? And what do they find there? We asked three first-timers what they were getting out of the conference. (Quite a bit, it turns out!)*

**Ron Jones** is a lay chaplain from North Shore Unitarian in West Vancouver. He and his wife drove up to Edmonton in their camper van, and the hotel allowed them to park it in the outdoor lot, conveniently next to the hotel restaurant!



Jones was struck by, "the richness of people here, flowing by you like a river." He felt, "goodwill, support and positive vibrations" in the smaller group meetings and workshops he attended. He notes that his congregation was missing its connection to the old Pacific North West District of the UUA. However, by attending the cuc conference, "I think I've captured a little bit of the bigger vision of the Canadian Unitarian movement."

Jones volunteered earlier this year with the Central America Project, travelling to Honduras with other Unitarians to work on a small construction project. In Edmonton, he was able to meet the project coordinator Richard Kirsh of Toronto, as well as participants in other international programs. "It was broadening to see our project as part of the broader picture of our international involvement," he says.

His favourite event of the weekend was the spiritual dance workshop on Friday night. "It was tremendously quiet, healing, meditative and harmonious." □

**Sharmila Khare** runs a young adult group for the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa. At the annual conference she attended a session on contemporary worship, led by Michael Tino of the UUA. "I liked his comparison of the traditional 'sandwich' model of worship (hymns and readings on either side of a meaty sermon) with an Ethiopian platter model, which offers a wider variety of smaller things."

Khare jumped into the conference with both feet, volunteering for the cuc choir – an instant choir made up of all the willing singers attending the conference. The catch is, they rehearse three times in 48 hours, in time to sing several pieces at the large Sunday worship. "It's a lot of fun to be part of such a big service," says Khare, referring to the 300 delegates and Edmonton members who joined forces on Sunday.



Khare is an economist with the federal Ministry of Finance in Ottawa, so she's no stranger to procedure. She was impressed by the parliamentary process used at the formal business meetings. "It was very laborious," she observes, "but necessary for setting direction that will affect the whole organization." □

**Marnie Girvan** is president of the Guelph Unitarian Fellowship, a lay-led congregation in southern Ontario. She came to the annual conference looking for connection to the broader movement. She says her breath was taken



away at the Sunday worship, "with 300 Unitarians singing together in a single room." It was a big contrast to the group of 50 she worships with on a normal Sunday.

She also attended workshops titled, "No More Begging: Three steps to an Effective Canvass" and "The Inclusive and Inviting Congregation." Girvan says she found "everything useful," and learned that "other people are facing the same issues that we are."

She recently retired from a globe-trotting career with the Canadian International Development Agency (she was a key Canadian organizer of the 1995 Conference on Women in Beijing). At an evening presentation on international work, Girvan met Myda Egrmajer who would soon be travelling to Tanzania. "I lived there for four years," she says, "so I was able to mentor Myda, encouraging her in her journey and assuring her that Swahili is an easy language to learn!" □