



Mary Bennett

CUC Executive Director

Tales from my diplomatic mission to a 'foreign' country

It's June 30 and I've just returned from six days in Long Beach, California, at the General Assembly (i.e. conference) of the Unitarian Universalist Association, our former parent denomination.

GA is a mammoth gathering, compared to our own annual conference. I wondered how we would be received, now that we're autonomous from the UUA. It felt like I was on a diplomatic mission to a foreign country.

CUC President Brian Kiely and I led a workshop called "What's Happening in Canada?" To our surprise, about 40 people showed up. They were curious about how we are handling social justice issues like drug policy, peace and same sex marriage. In terms of our relations with the UUA, I heard a wide range of perspectives about the transition. Some examples (paraphrased):

- I hear things are going well. We should have done it 10 years ago.
- Have the Canadians changed their mind and decided to rejoin the UUA?
- I hope there'll be more cross-border events like Cascadia.
- We're still mourning.

It was important to be there and listen to these and other comments – and to share my own perspective of what's happening in Canada and at the CUC.

I think our change was the right step, and at the right time. I don't think 10 years earlier would have worked. We won't be going back to the old relationship; we can be intentional and positive about continuing to craft this new relationship of equal partners.

I hope there will be more cross-border conferences and events – and that those who are mourning will, when the time is right, participate or even help create those events. The CUC will continue to be represented at GA and continue to be grateful for the opportunities it offers.

Testimony

by Elisabeth Bailey

'This is the place for me,' I said immediately

Sometimes I tell people that I was raised UU, but that's not entirely true. Even though both of my parents attended a UU church growing up, in terms of both moral leadership and Sunday morning focus, I was really raised New York Times. I grew up pitying people who "had" to go to church, dressing up in starchy clothes to go sit quietly on hard, wooden pews, while I was watching cartoons in my pyjamas and eating doughnuts.

But as I got older in my small hometown of Galesburg, Illinois, I felt a growing need for spiritual community. I knew that I wasn't going to go to hell for my doughnut eating ways, and that racism and homophobia couldn't possibly be what God intended. But it's hard to be a lone wolf for liberal ethics in a playground full of conservative Christian playmates. My grandmother told me all about her experiences at the First Unitarian Church of Chicago where she had taken my father as a boy, and I decided that when I grew up I'd go there. And I did.

It was ... okay. I liked what the minister said, but there weren't any people my age and no one ever talked to me. After a few months I decided that it didn't matter if it was a great community if I wasn't really a part of it. Then one day a friend at work told me how much he liked attending Second Unitarian of Chicago. I decided to check it out. The next Sunday I walked up to the church and immediately saw a face I recognized. Sharon was a frequent scotch drinker at the bar of the



Yes, that's a flaming chalice tattooed on Elisabeth's right arm!

restaurant where I was waiting tables.

It turned out that she was also the DRE of the congregation. Sharon grabbed me right away and took me on a tour of the religious education program. I walked into the common room for children's worship and saw a group of five-year-olds working on a banner for the new lesbian minister

and her partner. "Welcome Lynn and Kelsey!" it said.

"This is the place for me," I said immediately. I got involved in the congregation and eventually found myself wishing that I could do the same thing with my life that Reverend Lynn was. (But surely someone as irreverent as me couldn't go into ministry?)

It's six years later now, and I'm one credit shy of graduation from seminary and happily anticipating a long career in ministry – hopefully in Canada! I watch other young adults finding their places in congregations and know that part of my work has to be guaranteeing that there *are* places – and community – for them to find.

As we learn to engage our youngest members we will grow as a movement in ways we can't even imagine today. I look forward to getting to know hundreds of you over the years as we immerse ourselves in this work. ☐

– Elisabeth Bailey is the recently-appointed Canadian Regional Organizing Consultant for the Young Adult and Campus Ministry Office of the UUA. She and her husband John Frauzel live in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia with their two dogs. They are expecting their first child at Yule 2004.