

# A capital gathering – 2008 ACM

**I**n 2008, the May ACM will be held in Ottawa, Canada's capital, and the country's fourth largest city. Our hosts will be First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa, Canada's largest UU congregation with more than 800 members and friends.

THE FIRST UNITARIAN CONGREGATION OF OTTAWA HAS A TALENTED AND VIGOROUS GROUP OF LAY LEADERS STRIVING TO STRENGTHEN THEIR SPIRIT AND ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER IN EFFORTS TO MAKE THE WORLD A MORE PEACEFUL AND GENTLE PLACE.

### Brian Kopke is retiring.



... in June after 23 years' leadership and service at First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa. We will miss our minister, mentor, comforter, wood carver, carpenter, gardener, sound technician, fund raiser, musician - who spurs us on to greater achievements.

But we can stand proud on our own feet - this is his legacy, for which we thank him profoundly. He leaves us looking forward - with our second refugee in sanctuary; many active social responsibility groups; a church humming with interest groups; a major day-care building project on site and proud owners of a new Steinway grand - a gift to ourselves and to the music community. Fare Well, Brian - we wish you a productive and happy retirement.

Ottawa draws visitors from around the world with an abundance of parks, waterways, the renowned May Tulip Festival, the rich colours of the Gatineau Hills autumn leaves, and the winter attractions of skating on the Rideau Canal as well as the Winterlude festival.

English is the predominant language but French is also widely spoken. The City of Gatineau (pop. 230,000) across the river in the Province of Quebec is largely French-speaking. Ottawa has great cultural diversity resulting from immigration and the foreign embassies resident in town. This diversity and the increasing prosperity from the growth of high tech have made Ottawa a cosmopolitan and vibrant community.

With the retirement of minister Brian Kopke, the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa is pleased to welcome Rev. Janet Newman as the interim minister for 2007-08. Rev. Newman joins a talented and vigorous group of lay leaders striving to strengthen their spirit and encourage each other in efforts to make the world a more peaceful and gentle place. The congregation has a high proportion of members over 65 (41%) and half are retired. About 50% have been with the congregation for more than 15 years and 79% have university degrees.

Music is becoming increasingly important to the community with two choirs, a regular concert series in Worship Hall, and a lot of informal music just for fun. When Music Director Jane Perry arrived at First Unitarian

Congregation of Ottawa, she was struck by the perfect concert venue the building provided, and that the grand piano on-site was not up to the standard required by many professional musicians. A new Steinway was seen as a gift to the congregation and the community at large. It was selected by committee at the New York City Steinway factory, and delivered in April of this year. It took four years of dedicated fundraising by virtually every member of the congregation to raise over \$95,000.

Social action involves over 150 people in more than fifteen groups. Beginning in March 2007, the congregation has provided sanctuary to Shree Kumar Rai, a refugee who came to Canada over 10 years ago to escape torture and police oppression in his native Nepal. Shree entered sanctuary after exhausting all the normal remedies in Canada's refugee appeal process and being ordered to be deported at the end of February. The Sanctuary Committee is now looking for new means to have Shree accepted into Canada. He is the second refugee to find sanctuary at the church after Samsu Mia, who spent 18 months at the church before being allowed to remain in Canada.

The First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa members develop wings as they work at influencing opinion in the local community and on the national stage. The congregation hosts youth and adult conferences; members have been on the CUC executive and attend CUC, GA and UU-UNO conferences. They are very much looking forward to welcoming Unitarian Universalists from across Canada in May 2008. **U**

*Contributions from Carol Anne Deneka, Mike Cassidy and Havi Echenberg.*