

Across the Country



Members of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver Worship Committee practice their clapping (or not): Ken Wood, Diana Ellis, Margaret Murdoch, Way Kent, Louise Bunn.

Don't clap in church, unless you can't not!

Is it appropriate to clap in church? Or is applause more suited to the concert hall? That's the question members of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver are pondering this summer, as their Worship Committee tries to come up with a recommendation.

The congregation's new minister, Rev. Steven Epperson, is in favour of clapping as a spontaneous response to music or an address – he sometimes leads the applause himself. But others feel that the church is a sanctuary, and fear that clapping could become routine.

Here are two views from Vancouver, on both sides of the issue:

Louise Bunn

It seems to me the pro-clappers and the anti-clappers are not really talking about the same thing. The pro-clappers are concerned not to discourage spontaneous displays of emotion and approval. I suspect that most of the anti-clappers are not really opposed to spontaneous displays. The anti-clappers are concerned that a clapping culture may degrade their worship experience.

Clapping, after all, is something many of us associate with theatrical performances, opera, and sporting events. But I am sure that the pro-clappers (or most of them) would not want routine clap-

ping to occur in the same way as it does at these events.

I am not fond of the American Sign Language version of clapping [hand waving above the head]. It doesn't convey the feelings of delight that may cause me to clap. Perhaps it would in time, but it feels forced and artificial to me. I also wonder how a "no clapping" rule would sound to a newcomer. Very uptight, perhaps?


Margaret Murdoch

As most of you know, I was initially very opposed to the idea of clapping, which most of the time seemed to me like appreciative applause for a performance that was intended to be a part of our worshipping experience.

It certainly interrupts for me the feeling of worship, into which I like to slip soon after arriving in church on a Sunday morning – another world, beyond the everyday world most of us live in. Understand, please, it's not the music, which seems near perfect most of the time, it's the applause.

However, after Steven spoke his heartfelt ideas on the subject at our Worship Committee meeting, I felt like becoming quiet on this subject, and seeing what I could do about it within myself. A big stretch, still I hope to succeed in time – just let it go. After all, I don't have to clap and usually don't, in spite of "teaching" from childhood that it's a group experience and better join in.

I too, am moved occasionally, usually later in the service, to clap with verve and gusto – when I almost can't help it. It reminds me of my mother's advice: "Don't get married unless you can't not!"

So how about this for a new rule: "Don't clap unless you can't not!" 



The UU Fellowship of Kamloops built this permanent brick labyrinth in memory of one of their founding members, Karsten Iverson, who loved the silent meditation of walking its circles.

He died of ALS three years ago. Situated in the trees by the Thompson River, Kamloops Unitarians hope the labyrinth will become a spiritual centre for the city.