

## From the pulpit

by Don Hauka

# Taking a ride on Steven Epperson's magic bus

**Rev. Dr. Steven Epperson** took his audience for a ride on a magic bus during Sunday Worship at the CUC Annual Conference and Meeting in Vancouver.

You could hear a pin drop on May 20 as Epperson took the huge crowd, packed into in the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts, on a journey through the human spirit that honoured the past, but was firmly anchored in the here and now.

"Which way do we look?" Epperson asked his hushed audience. "Hop on the bus with me, and what do you see?"

Epperson used his daily commute aboard three different buses to illustrate "contextual theology," defined as "a way of religious thinking and acting that takes concrete human experience in a particular culture, landscape, and time as essential ingredients for creating authentic worship, spiritual exploration and ethical action; of making religion real and relevant to our lives here and now."

The journey from his home in the suburbs to Vancouver aboard public transit is Epperson's context.

"For the past five years, it's here on these buses that I have seen the face of contemporary Canada, the site of the contextual theology that we're going to do this morning," he said.

From the blue turbaned Sikh bus driver to the Filipino, First Nations, Asian, Anglo and other passengers, Epperson's bus – like Canada itself – is a "community of communities." Young and old, they move together through a heavily-populated urban landscape, seeking the same things: better lives, good work, peace and the chance to live close to their loved ones.

"In sum, ours is an urban and spectacularly diverse nation enriched by immigration, the experience of age

and the vigour, anxiety, and idealism of youth," said Epperson.

"Now look closer with me at our fellow bus riders. How are we behaving toward each other in this cramped, public space?"

Buses bring out the best and the worst in people's behaviours. The best and the worst is also on display outside the windows as the bus traverses the wealthiest and poorest neighbourhoods in Canada.

"This, too, is our context," said Epperson. "Our nation, in the words of Roy Romanow is a 'house half-built.' Our legacy and values, he writes, a country based on fairness, opportunity and respect, our social contract of a shared destiny, the very 'cornerstone of the Canadian idea,' is under assault."

The urban squalor the bus passes through is a daily reminder to us that 1.2 million Canadian children, one in six, live in deep poverty, and of the growing gap between rich and poor.

"Why is it that the city of Vancouver, the size of Portland, Oregon, has more than twice the number of homeless than the city of Paris? It's a scandal," said Epperson.

"One in four jobs in Canada pay less than \$10 an hour. We work, and yet half the people in this country are afraid that real poverty is as close as one or two missed pay cheques away!"

Canadian society can be transformed into a vanguard nation that is well served by public transit, well housed, well fed and well-compensated for its labour with the help of Unitarian Universalists, says Epperson, but it requires action.

"Get out of your cars; out of comfortable pews and places of worship. Take a ride with me on a bus—it's a good context for the religious and ethical thinking, the worship and action that we are called upon and covenant



*Rev. Dr. Steven Epperson greets "his students and scholars" in church every Sunday, often asking them questions about religious holidays and important secular events.*

to live in this nation of ours," said Epperson.

"We in our fellowships and congregations have the potential, given our heritage, our sources, our principles, in spite of the fact that we are few in number, to act as leaven in this whole, crazy, blessed loaf of Canada and thus help to achieve more justice, meaning, hope and compassion for ourselves and for generations to come.

"Let it be said of us in the future that we figured out how and where to look within and beyond ourselves; and that we became a beloved community to this nation and a blessing to its people." **U**

To see the complete sermon, go to: <http://cuc.ca/ministry/index.htm#Ministers>