

others), started Child Haven International (www.childhaven.ca). It now cares for over 1,000 formerly destitute children and women in India, Nepal, Tibet, and Bangladesh.

In 2004 our CUC Executive Director Mary Bennett arranged for a presentation before the Parliamentary Committee studying same-sex marriage. She prepared a document outlining positions taken by the CUC. She polled each of our 27 ministers in Canada. The 13 MPs had our document before them, and she was able to report that all 27 Unitarian ministers “would do a same-sex marriage.” The vote was seven to six in favour of same-sex marriage. It is possible that Mary’s presentation turned the tide. *Even one person can do a lot!*

4. DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT

The 500-foot Pride Rainbow Banner on Parliament Hill in 2005 carried by Calgary Unitarian youth and others (photo on previous page) was a huge success in promoting the same-sex marriage bill.

My going into voluntary sanctuary was news. On June 22, 2004, three TV crews, three radio crews, and four newspapers were present to watch me roll my little suitcase into the church. Of course, we had an excellent media sub-committee.

The Raging Grannies are *news!* – guaranteed to provide laughs. Singing is important. We sang for five days and nights at Selma. Labour Leader Kermit Eby said, “The unions began to lose power when they stopped singing.”

OTHER QUICK POINTS

- Be wary of someone taking over with an agenda not in harmony with our principles. The board has a duty to see that no unauthorized person speaks in the name of the congregation. The board can also determine membership on the

Social Action/Responsibility Committee.

- You can’t do everything. Choose your issue carefully.
- Coalitions are important. You can work with some Catholic groups on peace and with labour groups on civil liberties.
- Avoid righteous anger. Indeed, the Dalai Lama feels that *any* anger can be counter-productive. He is right. Appeal to conscience. Also it is good to say the opponent has a blind spot, not that he/she is wicked. De-fang your opponent by using love.

We are called upon to *engage in the struggle* for human betterment. We don’t know ahead of time if our struggle will succeed. We will often fail. But when success does come, it is *oh so sweet!*

CUC AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

To find out more about the Canadian Unitarian Council’s resolutions and statements on Social Responsibility issues go to: www.cuc.ca/social_responsibility.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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UNITARIANS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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The main reason I am a Unitarian is to *do social action*. I believe we are called upon to show concern for “the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.” Back in 1957 the great Homer Jack was minister of the Unitarian Church of Evanston, Illinois. He also chaired a Peace Committee in Chicago of which I was a member.

I was a Methodist minister working hard to build a strong congregation, and to raise issues of peace and race. But it wasn't going well. The members were lukewarm in attending services. After a meeting of Homer's Peace Committee I was lamenting about this. He responded, “You can't build a church on social action. People come to church for comfort.” I might have left the ministry long ago had I not heard that sage advice.

There are hundreds of examples of Canadian Unitarians doing effective social action. I apologize for personal references, but they are examples with which I am most familiar. Having made lots of mistakes, I've learned a few things:

1. BEFORE TAKING A STAND ...

- Establish yourself in a tradition: the seven Unitarian principles, the relevant CUC social responsibility resolutions, the Bible (it doesn't belong to the fundamentalists), Jesus, Hosea

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and Jeremiah, Nellie McClung, Mother Jones, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Tommy Douglas, and the immortal Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma.

- Join the Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice; they do excellent work (www.cusj.org).
- Thoroughly research your subject. Your first mistake in point of fact can discredit you. Also be aware of possible negative personal consequences of your actions (public scorn or even jail). Is it worth it?
 - Try for consensus. Discussing the issue helps to educate everyone, including yourself. It also stimulates insight. In rare cases, a congregation may decide the cause to be so important that they will take action even if a few individual members leave.
 - If you can't get consensus, you can still act. If some people object to flying the church banner at a rally, try one in the name of the “Social Action Committee of (your) Unitarian Congregation.” It will have almost the same impact. In

rare cases, a board can decide for the congregation. In 2003, the board of Ottawa First, after careful study, decided to offer sanctuary to save the life of a refugee claimant, Mr. Samsu Mia.* If they had called a congregational meeting, Immigration might have grabbed him first!

2. SOCIAL ACTION SHOULD NOT TAKE OVER SUNDAY SERVICES

Perhaps two or three times a year an entire service could be devoted to a social action issue. At other services, you can say a lot about an issue in four minutes (plus a printed insert). The rest of the service can be devoted to “comfort.” Even the two or three social action services should include “comfort” elements: suitable hymns, meditations.

3. A FEW CAN DO A LOT

We complain that too few are interested. In Pointe Claire, four Unitarian women decided in 1968 to do something about phosphates in the water. They passed out flyers in front of a supermarket. In two or three years they had 20 chapters of STOP (Society To Overcome Pollution) – and 30 more high school chapters.

In 1985 Bonnie Cappuccino and I, (with help of

* I was in sanctuary for 4½ months. Samsu Mia was there for 11 months before I came, and a couple of months after. The case was resolved when the Immigration Minister came to the church and told him he was free to stay in Canada and that his wife and four children (who were also at risk) could come to Canada as well.

CONTINUED ON REVERSE ►