

September, 2008



Brian Griffin, DLRE of Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church, holding one of Sylvia's painted Chalices

→ **CUC IN ACTION** →

**Current Social Responsibility Letters,
Events, Topics & Discussion**

Response to Knoxville Tragedy

Canadian Unitarians responded to the tragic violence on Sunday, July 27, when a stranger opened fire during a children's program at Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church in Knoxville, killing two adults and wounding seven more. Press releases were sent to multiple media outlets all across Canada, and condolences were sent from many congregational pulpits. Within a very short time, Rev. Carole Martignacco had composed the following special chalice lighting to remember Knoxville:

Chalice Lighting: A Spiritual Home

By Rev. Carole Martignacco

As a spiritual home is a sanctuary, a safe space
for the gathering of the beloved community,
we light this chalice, symbol of our free faith,

In solidarity with brothers and sisters all over the world
who mourn with the Knoxville community last week's tragic events,
the violation of their sanctuary and the loss of precious lives.

We light this chalice in honour of the courage and goodness
of those who in every age, mindless of the cost to themselves,
are moved to shield others from acts of violence.

May this flame burn in our hearts today to warm us
and remind us that our greatest security lies in our choice
to answer hate with the all-consuming power of love.

INSIDE... Official response letters

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Statement issued jointly
by:
Rev. Carole Martignacco,
President of the
Unitarian Universalist
Ministers of Canada, and
Jean Pfleiderer, Ph.D.,
President of the
Canadian Unitarian
Council

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Statement issued by Rev.
Brian Kiely, President
International Council of
Unitarian Universalists

UNITARIANS MOURN SENSELESS VIOLENCE, AND CALL ON ALL COMMUNITIES OF FAITH TO RE-AFFIRM THE RIGHT TO WORSHIP

Canadian Unitarians respond to the tragic violence on Sunday, July 27, when a stranger opened fire during a children's program at Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church in Knoxville, killing two adults and wounding seven more:

We mourn with our brothers and sisters at Tennessee Valley the senseless and tragic violence and loss of life that occurred in their community last Sunday morning. We hold them in our hearts, and remember with them that Love is the spirit of this church.

"Such specific, targeted violence in a single community affects all people of faith," said Jean Pfleiderer, President of the Canadian Unitarian Council.

Our outrage at this violence is first for the people of the community in Knoxville, the families who have lost loved ones, and the adults and children whose personal suffering cannot be measured.

But also, we as faith communities everywhere, must be outraged for the violation to all who gather in worship anywhere, whose trust in the time-honoured tradition of a church as a religious sanctuary is violated anew.

"Collectively, we as religious communities must affirm together that acts of hatred and fear can never be tolerated as commentaries on religious beliefs or social justice policies," said Rev. Carole Martignacco, President of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers of Canada.

Rev. Chris Buice, the minister at Tennessee Valley, was quoted in an op-ed column printed last March in the Knoxville paper as saying:

"In the midst of political and religious controversy, I choose to love my neighbours as myself...Ultimately, I believe that tolerance, compassion and respect are the qualities we need to keep Knoxville and East Tennessee beautiful."

Compassion, respect and tolerance – are not those the very qualities needed to keep the world beautiful in every corner? Published months before the violent events in his congregation that tragically disrupted last Sunday's worship service, Rev. Buice's words nonetheless represent the stance taken by Unitarians and Universalists everywhere to injustice anywhere.

We stand in solidarity with him and his words. We applaud his faithful defence of human rights and his commitment to social justice. We invite other faith communities to stand with us.

We grieve with him now and offer our prayers for his congregation, that they may feel our loving support as they begin the long road toward recovery and healing.

The above statement issued jointly by:

Rev. Carole Martignacco (cell: 819-577-5533), President of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers of Canada, and Jean Pfleiderer, Ph.D. (cell: 613-484-6182), President of the Canadian Unitarian Council.

The Canadian Unitarian Council/Conseil unitarien du Canada (CUC), is an association of forty-five congregations located across Canada with 5,400 individual members. Arising out of the work of outspoken reformers and dissenters within the Christian tradition five centuries ago, the Unitarian movement today includes Universalists and flows in a broad religious stream augmented by Humanist, earth-centred, Buddhist and other progressive beliefs.

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From the ICUU President

The news of the recent shootings in a UU church in Knoxville, Tennessee, USA was at once troubling, saddening and in an odd way, encouraging.

It was deeply troubling in that one human soul could become so sick and twisted that he felt he had to try and kill complete strangers solely because they support liberal religious and social positions. This gunman apparently felt that all the things wrong in his life could be blamed on people with progressive points of view. Unitarian Universalists were convenient symbolic targets.

I know what it is to be dispirited and angry, even filled with rage, but I feel blessed that I have never been so overcome with illness, rage or hate that violence has seemed like a good option. For U*Us in many parts of the world this attack on our faith so deeply shocking as to be almost beyond comprehension. Yet I am mindful that for a good many of our brothers and sisters in too many parts of the world this act of violence, while still terrible, is not so rare or shocking. Our hopeful, loving faith exists in the midst of violence, lawlessness and political unrest, in the midst of warfare, in the midst of deeply dangerous circumstances. Perhaps those U*Us have a better understanding today of what our Tennessee sisters and brothers have experienced this week. Still, for me, fortunate to live in a fairly peaceful place, the news was terribly shocking.

One member of our local Edmonton church suggested that as with 9-11, there are a lot of people from our communities feeling a little less safe in their churches today. That is troubling.

And of course, these events leave deep feelings of sadness for the victims, their families and friends. Only people who have been through that kind of experience can begin to grasp what the families must be enduring. I feel blessed that I have never had to face such events. All I can write is that I feel tremendous sympathy for the members and friends of the Tennessee Valley UU Congregation as they grieve their losses and try to find ways to feel safe again in their church.

But in the end, there have been some encouraging things, too. The first victim died while saving others from the gunman. Several people present rushed the man and subdued him risking their own lives. Throughout Knoxville, churches of other faiths have been providing real support and public witness for their Unitarian Universalist neighbours. The UUA has sent a trauma team of experts to provide counselling and assistance. And as I write, six days after the shooting, the members of the church are working hard to make their next Sunday service a reclamation of their home and a rededication to their values.

Even more hopefully the congregation's minister, Rev. Christopher Buice and UUA President Rev. William Sinkford have issued strong and faithful statements. Both have declared that our liberal approach will not be altered or changed by this tragedy. They speak of love and compassion, not hate and revenge. In the midst of this tragedy, the people are finding new strength and resolve. They are finding positive meanings in this terrible event.

We who choose a liberal and principled approach to faith can expect to be tested in that faith from time to time, though seldom is the test as shocking as last Sunday in Knoxville. It is at moments like these that we look to those Principles and to our understanding of the divine working within us to pull us through. May our Knoxville sisters and brothers find the strength they need in their time of grieving. May we all join them and find new reasons to renew our own commitment to our UU faith.

Rev. Brian J. Kiely
President
International Council of Unitarians and Universalists

Date: 04 June, 2008

*The **Environmental Monitoring Group**, based on a resolution developed and approved by the Vancouver Church, is proposing that congregations and indeed individuals adopt a similar resolution along the following lines— see below:*

Socially Responsible Investment Policy and Tar Sands

Given our seventh principle that we promote: “respect for the inter-dependent web of existence, of which we are a part.’, and Unitarians’ long and proud history acting in a socially responsible manner, it is recommended that all congregations adopt, if they have not already done so, the practice of socially responsible investing. Further, in addition to any screens against tobacco, weapons, child labour etc. that the issue of “responsible” investments in the “Tar Sands” be identified and considered.

There is only a finite amount of fossil fuel in the world and conventional resources are diminishing. The “Tar Sands” represent a significant reserve of non-conventional oil and they are now being exploited in a significant way. Tar Sands demand considerably more energy than conventional reserves to exploit. As a result the production of oil in the Tar Sands is creating millions* of tonnes (yearly) of CO₂ and CO₂ equivalent Greenhouse Gases (GHGs). This jeopardizing the health and well being of us all, contributes to the global problem of Climate Change, and does not help us to meet our nation’s international commitment (Kyoto).

In addition part of the Canadian Boreal Forest is being stripped away to access tar sands, and the waste products of exploitation threaten not only people and ecosystems in the area, the resultant polluted ponds of process water produced threaten migrating birds and represent a risk to all down stream.

Accordingly all Unitarian Congregations who maintain funds and have investments are requested to consider directing those who invest church funds, to divest from the “worst tar sands exploiters” and retain only “the best in class”. To assist in this determination all are referred to the “Sustainability Perspective March 2007 – Head in the Oil Sands? Climate Change Risks in Canada’s Oil Sector” by The Ethical Funds Company, Vancouver BC.

Lastly, it follows that individual Unitarians who have similar investments exercise the same “Socially Responsible Investment” practice and are encourage to ensure that their investments in the “tar sands”, if any, are appropriate with their values.

Additional information follows:

* By Cahal Milmo Monday, 10 December 2007 in “The Independent” (UK) quote: “Producing crude oil from the tar sands a heavy mixture of bitumen, water, sand and clay found beneath more than 54,000 square miles of prime forest in northern Alberta an area the size of England and Wales combined generates up to four times more carbon dioxide, the principal global warming gas, than conventional drilling. The booming oil sands industry will produce 100 million tonnes of CO₂ (equivalent to a fifth of the UK’s entire annual emissions) a year by 2012, ensuring that Canada will miss its emission targets under the Kyoto treaty, according to environmentalist activists...”