

September 10, 2006

**REPORT ON CHALLENGE IN CHOICE:
THE WORLD FEDERATION OF RIGHT TO DIE SOCIETIES 17TH
BIENNIAL CONFERENCE**

The Challenge in Choice, World Federation of Right to Die Societies Conference was held in Canada on September 7-9th 2006, for the first time, and I, along with Mary Bennett, CUC Executive Director, and Doug Campbell, former Chair of the Monitoring Group attended at the Sheraton Centre in Toronto as the CUC delegates.

The conference included over 300 delegates from 23 countries and featured world-class speakers and panel members, including Derek Humphry, from the U.S. and author of "Final Exit", Dr Philip Nitschke, from Australia, author of "The Peaceful Pill Handbook" and Dr Robert Buckman, a favourite local speaker and author of "Not Dead Yet".

Lesley Martin, of Australia, who received a prison sentence for compassionately assisting her deathly ill mother, spoke passionately about her experience which inspired her book "To Die Like a Dog".

Evelyn Martens endured a harrowing undercover police sting on an alleged assisted suicide, and had to go through an agonizing trial in Vancouver, where a jury found her not guilty. Her personal account of the events drew tears from the delegates.

The conference was hosted by Dying With Dignity of Canada and provided a forum for all societies to exchange information and learn about the successes and failures in the movement worldwide.

Martin Frith, Co-ordinator, Client Support Program at DWD and his team of Volunteer Client Support Workers gave an enlightening workshop called, Double-Trouble: Navigating the Waters of Anticipatory and Disenfranchised Grief. It showed that the "secrecy", necessary in the process, adds an additional element by delaying closure.

Currently Right to Die legislation only exists in the U.S. (Oregon), Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium and Japan, and although suicide is not a crime in Canada, assisted suicide is.

Compassion and Choices is the new name for the amalgamated U.S. groups End of Life Choices (formerly the Hemlock Society) and Compassion and Dying.

The Canadian Unitarian Council has adopted three resolutions on the right to die. In 1973 the focus was on withdrawal of treatment in terminal illness.

In 1976, the resolution "urges the Law Reform Commission of Canada to propose a modification to the criminal code, subject to proper safeguards and sanctions, expedient to the situation when the withdrawal of life support treatment would be considered an act of compassion"

Examples of acts of compassion included assisting a patient to commit suicide with compassion rather than malice and motive.

In 1993, it was further resolved that the CUC adopt a policy that advocates the legalization of the rights of mentally competent, terminally or irreversibly ill persons to determine the manner of their dying, and that the

CUC support efforts to increase the availability of palliative care so that terminally ill patients will be better supported as they make their individual choices about dying.

In 1993 it was resolved that the CUC will create an ongoing national committee mandated to act upon the CUC policy recommendations in this area.

Current members are Douglas Campbell, Toronto, Rev. Brian Kiely Edmonton and Bob Hotrum, Chair, Kingston.

Because the principles of the Unitarian Universalism affirm the worth and dignity of every person, the right of conscience, and the use of justice, equity and compassion in human relations, it behoves us to support and promote this movement.

See The Social Responsibility-Choice in Dying link on the CUC website for more information:
www.cuc.ca/social_responsibility

CUC has a long-standing relationship with Dying with Dignity, including sharing office space for many years. We were pleased to have an exhibit table at the conference. Thank you to Don Babey, Executive Director of DWD, for collaborating with us to allow mutual visibility and connections.

Yours in Faith,
Bob Hotrum, Chair, CUC Choice in Dying Monitoring Group