

MARCH 9, 2014, WOMEN'S SERVICES CUUWA SUMMARY

One initiative that has captured the imagination of many Unitarians is the request to develop a woman-centred service in early March. Last year CUUWA reported 6 such services scattered across the country. This year we met a goal of doubling the participating numbers of Congregations and Fellowships. We know of 12 services in March that had woman-centred content but we don't know many of the details! Therefore, I'm summarizing what we do know with the hope that others might let us know of their special program.

Why early March? For approximately a century, March 8 has been a date to celebrate women's efforts to obtain greater equity in their workplaces. In 1986, the United Nations designated March 8 as International Women's Day (IWD). That history is well described and documented on the internet so I won't expand here. Although equity has not been achieved, working conditions and opportunities have improved (Canadian women earn approximately \$.70 relative for every \$1 that men receive in various career fields and that differential has remained stable for many years). Gradually, the discussion expanded to defining what is "equity". These themes include caregiving, not only for children but for senior relatives; poorly paid human service professions that increase quality of life but that have a majority of women working in them i.e housekeepers, nannies; and how career stop outs for maternal child care affect career momentum.

With respect to CUUWA, positioned as it is within a religious context, the focus is not only upon professional challenges but also upon personal development (many aspects of a women's life cycle do vary from a man's and that is normal variance); public domain images (competent women are as desirable and sexy as vacuous models); political participation (why has the high number of 6 women premiers suddenly become 2 beleaguered leaders). Most of all: how might women move from marginalized positions into mainstream flow with respect to society, including our own denominational faith. Do we even know about our own female spiritual leaders and what were their achievements. On the CUUWA web page, these four perspectives are known as "the 4Ps".

Therefore, we hope to evolve a woman-centred service tradition that is as beloved as the flower communion. That objective might take a while but this year 12 innovative services represented such an opportunity. Here is an excerpt from the Halifax congregation service entitled "Between Hope and Memory":

Our lives are a constantly moving link between the past and the future. What were some of the experiences of the oldest people known to us when we were still young? And how far into the future will the lives of the youngest among us reach? In recognition of International Women's Day, we will consider how the lives of real individuals connect the otherwise untouchable reaches of time.

We included some of the youngest girls and the older women in the congregation in the service. Three of our elders described some of the memories of the past and described the lives of the oldest people they had known when they were young (mostly born around the 1860s). We heard some stories about what life was like for those people, and then in the 20th century. Then we considered how far into the future the lives of people in our congregation might still be remembered--around 2200, if these girls live to be old and are in turn remembered by people who then live for a long time!

We briefly considered what the world might look like in 2200 to people who conceivably could still remember some of our present members. So we looked at the way time stretches forward and backward around those of us who currently occupy our brief time on the planet. I ended by asking the congregation to remember our obligation to hold all the world's children in their hearts.

It was a very nice service--we heard a lot of good responses from the congregation. (Martha Wilson)

In Fredericton, Montreal, Kingston, Toronto, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Victoria, Nanaimo, and Comox, March 9 services included references to women's contributions and issues. In Edmonton, a breadmaking workshop was held Saturday, March 8. The long time feminist anthem is "Bread and Roses" (written by John Denver in the 70s but based upon an earlier poem). "Bread" symbolically represents the fight to survive (jobs, food, shelter, and safety; "Roses" represent the need "to thrive", (beauty, creativity, joy, literacy, freedom). In the March 9 Comox Valley Fellowship Sacred Circle service, we built an altar of bread and roses. Our theme was Portrayals of Everywoman: volunteers were draped with items that reflected ongoing themes such as how clothing styles might constrain us (Joy Johnston in an oversized purple bra, undersized girdle and overly high pumps clearly drove home that point.) The youngest person presented a rose to the eldest; each spoke words of wisdom. After the service, everyone enjoyed the special loaves of bread.

I've left out some details but we hope that you might visit our website to add your own descriptions. Perhaps you'll be inspired to plan a March 8 service in 2015. Eventually, it will be normal to have a March women's service that we all appreciate, one that honours our lives and those who came before us as well as those who will follow. Blessed Be.

Betty Donaldson
President.