

**THE UNITARIAN CHURCH OF MONTREAL**  
**In the 50's & 60's:**  
**Personal recollections by Barbara Goode**

Good Morning!

The Unitarian Church of the 1950's and 60's was an integral part of my transition from early childhood to adulthood. We began as an Anglican family in British Columbia, but our transfer to Montreal also brought a migration to Unitarianism when my Dad's boss, Dave Tennant, an active church member, introduced him to what my parents decided was a better fit. In that sense, we are pretty typical of how "converts" have found the UCM over the decades. What I recall about the change as a 7-year-old was that at first I missed the felt board bible stories in the Anglican Sunday School, but felt more than compensated by the enthralling Christmas productions the Everyman Players performed every year. I also preferred the livelier hands-on approach of our new church Sunday School. In Unitarian House we explored historic "liberal thinkers" and put ourselves into each story. I was particularly taken with Akhenaten the very young reformist and feminist-leaning Egyptian Pharaoh. I still use the clay pyramid I made as a bookend. (Demo)

I see now how well the dynamo Diana Scott as Director and our volunteer teachers were opening us up to various religious approaches and to questioning and comparing. I recall our outreach visits to other religious services: after visiting Temple Emmanuel I thought I could be a pretty good Reform Jew. Then I quite liked the warm handshaking that concluded a Quaker service. And we all marvelled at the long aisle of the St Andrew's & St. Paul's church (a church a classmate dubbed "everything we weren't"). But ultimately, I decided I was probably best staying a Unitarian because I didn't like the Catholics and Anglicans calling me a sinner when I hadn't really done anything that bad yet. I felt in the right place when attending our own services. It was a heady combination of comfort and challenge: the soaring Gothic columns and carved pews brought a sense of Unitarians who had gone before; I loved the thunderous sound of Kenneth Meek's organ-playing and the stimulation of thoughtful sermons. Rev. Leonard Mason's eloquence in the pulpit and commitment to community social action sent me out determined to engage in the world and make a difference.

Leonard was a prominent and popular public speaker and his command of oratory was legendary. So, I listened closely when he coached me to speak to the congregation on Youth Sunday. "Accentuate all your consonants and don't drop your voice at the end of a sentence." I think he was also the first person to tell me if I was nervous to imagine the audience in their underwear. Leonard had

many interests including a love of the outdoors. I thought you might like to see a carving I'm lucky to have. (Demo)

I see church involvement and, in particular, participation in a teen group like the Maplewood Club of the 50s and 60s as a pivotal force in our formative years that nourishes our individual thinking and self worth. With the congregation at an all time high, our group numbered between 15 and 20 and met in a rundown room above an old garage on church property. It wasn't the temperamental gas heater, but our heated discussions that kept us warm on winter mornings. With the guidance of Advisors Charles & Catherine Seaborn we covered all the urgent questions facing world citizens in the turbulent 60's while also confronting our own interpersonal issues in the spirit of Liberal Religion: openness to other opinions, questioning, researching, daring to share, reaching our own conclusions. Paralleling the activity of adult members at that time, we joined counterparts in the Ottawa, Toronto and Lakeshore churches to form the Eastern Canadian Federation of Liberal Religious Youth (ECF) – complete with logo and letterhead. We produced a newsletter and organized conferences in each other's towns- much to the amazement of our non-Unitarian friends.

Here's a sample of our typical LRY fare:

Is there a God?

Do you believe in sex before marriage?

“For Beatnik night in Channing Hall bring your own poem, guitar and pillow. Folk song sheets will be supplied.”

What do we owe our parents and what do they owe us?

Is high school relevant?

Ban the Bomb – How can anyone disagree?

When does “Liberal” become “Arrogant”?

Time magazine says the world is coming to an end – what would you do with your last days?

We obviously didn't resolve all of those topics despite our cockiness . . . and the world didn't end after all. But my time today IS coming to an end. So, to sum up: the 50's and 60's church was a great time and place in which to grow up! Years later in 1987 when I worked in an office at the corner of Bishop and Sherbrooke, it was painful to look out on the remains of the Church of the Messiah after the devastating fire. But resilience and change have been part of the church's history from the start.

In this anniversary year, it's been a pleasure to recall the period known as the church's “sunshine years”. As we contemplate where and what the church will be in the coming decades I see more sunshine ahead.