"I think people respond to dystopian stories because they’re ways of acting out anxieties that we have and fears that we have about the future. So much media’s coming at you over the Internet, your brain gets overloaded, you don’t know what to do with it, And one thing you can do with it is read a story

 — Suzanne Collins, author, The Hunger Games

I’m not a great reader. I mean, I love to read, but I normally fall asleep within 20 minutes so it’s hard to get a good groove in a book. A few years ago, I had the rare experience of finding a book that grabbed me enough that I read it in (almost) one sitting and fed the kids granola bars for a day. It was The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins, and it’s our GRU reads for this quarter.

The Hunger Games takes place in a dystopian society, where once a year youth are forced to fight to the death for a televised competition. The topic of the book isn’t pleasant, and yet, the book has resonated with millions of readers because it has moments of great beauty and integrity. It’s more than the violence in this series that have captured people’s’ imagination, it’s the questions that it raises about power and inequity. It’s themes, both negative, (like classism, injustice and suffering as entertainment) and positive (like empathy, identity and community) are easy to see in our own lives. There are lots of ideas here that we can explore together.

Please join us as we have a look at this book over the next three months. I’d encourage you to chat about it informally during coffee hours, or come discuss it with us at book club on Saturday, February 27th at 3 pm (and if you don’t have time to read the book we’ll show the movie that day at 1 pm to get you caught up fast.) Many of our junior youth have read this book or seen the movie, so I’d invite you to ask them about their thoughts on it. It’s a great opportunity for shared experience with those who can see it through a different lens.

Happy reading, everyone!

Reflection by Julie Taylor
Happiness is a hot cup of coffee and friendly conversations at GRU!!

There is an urgent need to fill the role of **Kitchen Co-ordinator** at our congregation. This volunteer job has two main aspects:

1. Co-ordinating the 5 POD teams who handle coffee hour after church each Sunday.
2. Managing kitchen supplies and facility.

In the past, this was a one person position, but it could also work well as a team of two. Everything needed for the role is well organized and documented. If you would consider volunteering, please contact Board President **Janis Collins** at president@grandriverunitarian.ca

**Position Opening: Newsletter Editor**

Our current editor of the Window, Jessica Bayne, will be stepping down after publishing the Summer 2016 issue. The Window is currently published quarterly, but in the past, did publish ten issues per calendar year. If you have experience in desktop publishing, proofreading, writing, or editing, please connect with Jessica about this exciting opportunity.
A Board on the Waves

We’ve had another exciting few months at Grand River Unitarian! Here are some highlights of what the Board of Trustees has been doing during its meetings of September through December.

The Leadership Council and Board had a very productive combined meeting on October 14th. The focus of the meeting was to prepare for the 2016 budget. Action team representatives were invited to share their plans for the next year and demonstrate how their budget requests support them. We got so much work done, that there was no need for a December Leadership Council meeting! We will have another combined meeting on February 10th.

We are working on lining up Board member terms so that there are never more than three of seven members leaving at the same time. The bulk of that work was done with the by-laws changes from two years ago. The last piece is to have the congregation approve a temporary two-year term for one of the four positions that will be voted on this year. You will hear more about that process closer to the Annual General Meeting.

In response to a request from Director of Religious Exploration, Julie Taylor, we looked at the wages we pay for our childcare workers. We have increased the amount we pay to our under-18 workers and will be asking the Human Resources team to include the childcare workers in its yearly wage review.

Larry Maki and a group representing those who most often use the space (Children’s Religious Exploration, QUEST, Library, Building and Grounds) have been redesigning our classroom area. This is an ongoing process. More information will be shared in 2016.

Applications to be a delegate at the 2016 Annual Conference and Meeting of the Canadian Unitarian Council can be found on our website (www.grandriverunitarian.ca). The ACM will be in Vancouver. If you are interested, please submit an application by February 7th, 2016.

At the request of the CUC, the Board has agreed, in principle, to host the Central Region’s Fall Gathering in October 2016. There are a few details to be worked out before a final decision can be made, but we are excited by the possibility.

Perhaps most exciting is the work that has been done toward sponsoring a refugee family from Syria. The principle work has been done by Kristen Wilson and the Refugee team, but the Board has reviewed the status and made decisions to help the process along each month. We were so pleased and gratified by the outpouring of generosity shown by the congregation at the Special Meeting of the Members, held on December 6th. Not only did you vote unanimously to sponsor the family, but you pledged enough money to allow us to fully fund the sponsorship. I am humbled by the way in which we, as a community of faith, have stretched to meet our goal of meaningful action to create a better world.

I look forward to 2016 in anticipation of our growing personally, supporting one another in community, and continuing to take meaningful action in the web of all existence.

“If I have to pick one story that most influenced The Hunger Games, it would be the Greek myth of Theseus, which I read when I was about 8 years old. In punishment for past deeds, Athens periodically had to send seven youths and seven maidens to a labyrinth. In the maze was this Minotaur, and it would eat them.”

— Suzanne Collins
FIRE is a recurring motif in this quarter’s GRU READS challenge, *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins. The dystopian trilogy is set in a world where the disparity between rich and poor has dismantled the moral fibre of civilization. The series heroine, underdog Katniss, parades in a uniform of fire, earning her the nickname of “The Girl Who Was on Fire” as she sparks a revolution.

FIRE is a fitting motif for our congregation, too. There is the obvious connection with our weekly lighting of the chalice, singing “Carry the Flame,” and our annual Fire Communion service, but beyond that it does feel like since September we have also ‘caught fire.’ There has been a renewed enthusiasm among leaders, in attendance on Sundays and events, in membership inquiries, and in our enthusiastic support of refugee sponsorship. The energy is contagious – “Fire is catching!” as they say in *The Hunger Games*.

With this consuming ‘fire’ unleashed this year, we must all be especially conscious of making sure we tend those flames with the kind ‘kindling’ of self-care so that we ourselves are not consumed and overwhelmed by it. Voting for and financing refugee sponsorship is just the beginning of the year-long effort to which the congregation has committed.

My ‘kindling’ last month in this regard was the invitation to witness the Canadian citizenship ceremony of the Castro-Castaneda family who we sponsored five years ago. Their lives in Colombia had become dangerous; watching them take the oath of citizenship, with their Canadian-born son Gabriel prancing around the chamber, reminded me of the important ‘spark’ our congregation provides to one another and to the wider world.

See you Sunday! Rev. Jess

Minister’s User Guide, v. 8.0

Rev. Jess sets time aside every week for daytime appointment requests – to talk about matters of faith, pastoral concerns, home and hospital visits, or just to get acquainted. Evening and weekend appointments require more advance planning. She works primarily from a home office, and accepts phone calls between 10 am and 10 pm only. Please do not phone before 10 am except for emergencies. She works most nights and weekends, taking Tuesdays off for rest and rejuvenation; Friday is devoted to study and sermon preparation. For appointments or non-urgent matters, email minister@grandriverunitarian.ca or phone her at 519-208-3374. Social media is not a reliable way to reach the minister. For general office or directory inquiries, please consult the website or contact our office administrator for assistance.

“One of the most memorable things I hear is when someone tells me that my books got a reluctant reader to read.”

— Suzanne Collins
What Our Stories Tell

I was talking with a couple of our teachers recently who shared a story about one of the lessons they taught. The book that was featured told a story of a boy who lives in Cairo, and he goes about his busy day with a secret that he can’t wait to tell his family. The big reveal comes at the end of the story, when the boy tells his family that he learned to write his name. According to the teachers, the overall response from our kids was “That’s it? I’ve known how to write my name for years!” The teacher did her best to express that not everyone is as fortunate as we are, but it’s hard to really convey that when so many of our stories reflect a perspective of privilege and wrap up nicely with a happy ending. The stories our kids hear don’t tell about the children half a world away who risk their lives to go to school. The stories our kids hear don’t inform them that Native children in Canada never got the kind of education they should have had a right to. It’s omissions like these that make it so easy to take everything for granted. So I would invite you, especially those with kids who have access to the Internet (and access to its ignorance and hatred), to open up our conversations to include concepts of privilege, inequality, and gratitude.

For the next three months, GRU will be reading *The Hunger Games* and studying the themes that present themselves in the book; character, equity and belonging. This is a great opportunity (if you feel your kids are old enough) to join us in this shared experience and engage through imagination and conversation what it would mean to live in a corrupt society.

While we are studying the book, kids that are nine years old and up are invited to participate in our multi-generational book club (on February 27th) and Wellspring (on March 25th.) Keep an eye out for additional details!

And may the odds be ever in your favour. (I didn’t want to sign off with that, but I couldn’t help myself.)

Minister’s Invitations

**What Do You Say AFTER You Say “I’m a UU?”** Monday nights 7:30 – 9:30 pm, January 18th & 25th. This two-part workshop is designed to help you articulate what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist. Suitable for newcomers and for those looking for a ‘refresher’ in “UU 101.” RSVP required at the sign up desk or with Rev. Jess by January 11th so materials can be prepared.

**Life Passed through the Fire of Thought.** Wednesday nights 7:30 – 9:30 pm monthly: January 27th, February 24th, March 23rd. RSVP by January 18th required to Rev. Jess for the series. This series of experiential writing workshops is designed to ignite the creative process of the art of the personal essay. Enrolment is limited to 8 with priority given to those who are able to commit to all three sessions.

**Tea, TED, & Theology.** Thursdays, February 18th, 25th, and March 3rd. 1:30 – 3:00 pm in the Board Room. These informal conversation sessions offer an opportunity to delve more deeply into the themes of this quarter’s GRU READS selection. During each session, we will watch a series of short video talks on personal integrity and discuss how those issues impact and inform the choices we make in our lives. Tea will be served. If interested, please RSVP to Rev. Jess to be added to our email list so you will be notified in case of weather-related cancellations.

**The New UU: Membership at GRU.** Sunday, January 10th at noon. After the service on January 10th, join Rev. Jess, Janis Collins, and Cathy Scott in the Board Room with your coffee for an informal Q&A about the basics of membership here at the congregation.
The Social Action Committee would like to thank everyone for their generous donations in support of Argus Residence for Young People. We especially thank Brilliant Cacophony for their contributions to GRU’s Christmas collection.

Kate Green from USC Seeds of Survival will be our guest speaker at the service on Sunday, February 21st. We look forward to an informative and inspiring talk about working with farmers in the majority world and preserving seed diversity.

Save the Date! Our annual Fair Trade Coffeehouse will be on Friday, March 4th. There will be musical entertainment, fair trade and handmade items for sale, plus delicious food. We will need your help before, during, and after the coffeehouse as well as contributions of sweet and savoury snacks. Sign-up sheets will be posted on the SAC bulletin board at the beginning of February. All coffeehouse proceeds will be donated to USC Seed of Survival programs. This is always a fun event, so plan on attending!

The Social Action Committee is putting together a Congregational Service Book. Members of GRU are invited to advertise their skills to fellow congregants by adding a page describing the service offered to the Service binder. Please speak to a member of SAC for more information.

Amnesty International Action

Grand River Unitarian’s Amnesty International Action Circle met monthly during the Fall on the last Sunday of the month after the service, at 12 pm, with an added highlight being our annual “Write-for-Rights”. Amnesty groups and individuals hold this event worldwide on a date close to International Human Rights Day, December 10th. Our own “Write-for-Rights” took place on December 6th, after the special congregational meeting which followed the Sunday service. (The congregational meeting, which gave approval to sponsorship of Syrian refugees, was very much in tune with our group’s work, as was the service theme, “A Year in Syria”.) Members of the congregation signed several different letters and/or petitions relating to human rights in various parts of the world, and learned a little more about the focus of Amnesty International.

This special event emphasized an important aspect of our monthly meetings: taking action towards ending specific human rights abuses, in Canada and elsewhere in the world. (We usually choose to write about one case in Canada and one elsewhere.) Other aspects of our meetings are raising our awareness of human rights concerns worldwide and of the work that Amnesty International is doing. We also make time each month to hear encouraging “Good News” about that work, and to listen to each other’s special concerns and about long-term cases.

If you’re interested in human rights, you’d be most welcome at our meetings. Coming to a meeting does not commit you in any way, and if you can’t attend meetings but share our interests, we’d be delighted to put you on our mailing list, with details of actions you can take on your own. Just let me know, at uutreadwell@gmail.com

Warmly, Anne Treadwell, current Chair of the Circle, hoping to share this position in 2016!

“When I write a story, I hope it appeals to both boys and girls.”
— Suzanne Collins
In the now classic Starfish story, a person sees another person picking up and throwing back some of the thousands of starfish that have washed up on the beach. When questioned how they thought their work could make a difference, the person picks one up, throws it back and says, “Made a difference to that one”. The story is a powerful reminder that even small acts can affect an individual profoundly. However, what if there were a way to stop the starfish from getting washed up in the first place?

Our congregation has demonstrated incredible compassion with the sponsoring of a family from Syria, an act that will make an incredible difference in their lives. While I support this wholeheartedly, I also worry about the thousands of other refugees, and not just the ones from Syria, who are displaced due to violence and war. Is there something more that can be done?

As some of you know, I am the CUC representative on the governing committee of Project Ploughshares, which celebrates its 40th anniversary next year. Ploughshares was set up with a mission to “advance policies and actions that prevent war and armed violence and build sustainable peace”. Since then they have been involved in many ways to work towards peace. Their main focus targets four areas: eliminating nuclear weapons, preventing the weaponization of space, reducing the resort to military force, and controlling the supply and reducing the demand for conventional weapons.

On December 24th, 2014, the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) was brought into force. Project Ploughshares played a major part in this Herculean task of bringing almost all of the world’s countries together to agree on a treaty to regulate the trade in conventional arms that would help prevent human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. Although our government at that time missed the deadline for ratifying the treaty, the current government has pledged to sign on.

The recent book Disarming Conflict by Ernie Regehr, co-founder of Ploughshares, leads to the conclusion that history has proven time and again that military-only solutions will not produce sustainable peace. Ploughshares has worked with other NGOs, the United Nations, and governments to promote the kind of policies and dialogue that is necessary to not only defuse conflicts after they arise, but promote diplomatic solutions to prevent conflict from escalating into violence. As shown by the war in Iraq, military responses are not guaranteed to leave a sustainable peace. Ploughshares continues to caution strongly against the reliance on military responses to conflict in the absence of a broader political strategy that can create the conditions for sustainable peace.

Ploughshares is an organization that is actively working to promote peace – work that leads to the reduction of conflict, and reduces the need for regular citizens to flee their homes. Let’s continue to make a difference to individuals, but know that we can also work on reducing the chance of future starfish getting washed up on the beach. One way is by supporting the work of Project Ploughshares. If you would like more information, please ask me, or check their website at www.ploughshares.ca.

As the CUC representative at Ploughshares, I would also like to convey to all of you the deep gratitude that the staff of Ploughshares have towards all the sponsoring churches, and to the individual sponsors across Canada, whose support allows them to continue their work.
We continue to welcome several new people to GRU every month. Our ‘welcome cards’ are being well used!

At the new members service in October, eleven new members joined our congregation.

This fall, we hosted two **Friday Evening Socials**, which were well attended by 15 to 18 adults and several children. We enjoyed the games and meeting new people so much, that we are making this a regular monthly event from January to June.

We gather at the church for board games, card games, refreshments, and conversation. Children are welcome and there will be supervised activities for the children, so parents can have some ‘adult’ social time. Everyone is welcome to attend, and a special invitation is extended to all those who are new to the GRU community. Here are the details:

**Time:** 7:00 – 10:00 pm  
**Where:** GRU lower level  
**What to bring:** your favourite board game, deck of cards, snacks (no nuts please), and a children’s game or movie, which your children would like to share

**When:**
- Friday January 22nd
- Friday February 26th
- Friday April 1st
- Friday, April 29th
- Friday, May 27th
- Friday, June 24th

Please contact Cathy Scott at (519) 576-5676 or cathy.scottfree@gmail.com with any questions.

### Membership Path

Inspired by the New Member Ceremony held in November, a number of GRU friends have inquired about joining the congregation in time to vote at our Annual General Meeting in late February. So, by popular demand, we are holding the next ceremony on January 17th for those who RSVP for the ceremony. Anyone curious about the membership process and expectations are encouraged to join Rev. Jess and other leaders on Sunday, January 10th, in the Board Room at noon for a special coffee hour Q&A on Unitarian Universalism and membership.

Membership at the congregation requires a simple signing of our membership book signifying a commitment to share one’s time, talent, and treasure toward the shared values of the congregation. Translated, that means you intend to

- show up on a regular basis (Sundays and/or our other events, classes and forums) to forge connections within the congregation and by learning about Unitarian Universalism;
- let your voice be counted by voting & volunteering where your skill set meets the needs of this community; and
- donate an annual identifiable financial contribution (“money with your name on it” keeps your membership and voting rights active). The CUC guideline for appropriate contributions is 3-5% of income, considering your personal current circumstances. There is no minimum expectation set by our bylaws, and we trust your judgement of generosity and engagement.

Joining as a formal member of the congregation is a personal choice – we at GRU sometimes err on the side of a mixed message: yes we ardently want you to join AND it is okay to not join. We generally recommend that people have been regular attendees for at least 6 months before considering signing, and have met personally (or through a class or event) with the minister, Board President, or a Community Builder volunteer, and intend to participate in voting rights.

The January 17th ceremony is simple -- we will call you to the front during the service so that you can be introduced to the congregation for a short reading of a covenant. If you are interested in participating, please email Rev. Jess for more information or to answer any questions you may have (minister@grandriverunitarian.ca). RSVP is requested by January 12th.
Books, Books, Books!

The Library Committee has been hard at work selecting new books to add to our collection. We have selected books covering a wide variety of interests, from understanding other religions and religious development in Canada to personal quests and a deeper understanding of Unitarian Universalism. The Library is open after the service, staffed by the Library Committee. We would love to see you and help you find a book. The Library catalogue is searchable online, at http://www.librarything.com/catalog/grandriverunitarian

Our new books are (with a few annotations):

- **Landscapes Of Aging And Spirituality: Essays** - by UU Publisher Skinner House Books
- **Becoming Spiritual: a Spiritual Guide for Navigating Adulthood** - by UU Publisher Skinner House Books
- **Lifting our voices** - a collection of readings that are a companion to our hymnal
- **Cup of Light: All About the Flaming Chalice - Children’s book**
- **The Self-actualizing Cosmos: The Akasha Revolution in Science and Human Consciousness**
- **The Akashic Experience: Science and the Cosmic Memory Field**
- **The Truth About Grief: The Myth of Its Five Stages**
- **Nothing Gold Can Stay: The Colors Of Grief** - by UU Publisher Skinner House Books
- **The Wise Heart: A Guide To The Universal Teachings Of Buddhist Psychology**
- **No Boundary: Eastern and Western Approaches to Personal Growth**
- **Saving The Original Sinner: How Christians Have Used The Bible’s First Man To Oppress, Inspire, and Make Sense of the World** - by UU Publisher Beacon Press
- **A History of Anti-Semitism in Canada**
- **The New Canadian Pentecostals** - this book studied Pentecostal churches in Waterloo Region
- **The New Wild: Why Invasive Species Will Be Nature’s Salvation** - by UU Publisher Beacon Press
- **A God That Could Be Real: Spirituality, Science, And The Future Of Our Planet** - by UU Publisher Beacon Press
- **Transition to Common Work: Building Community at The Working Centre** - The Working Centre is a Kitchener organization that responds to unemployment and poverty locally
- **From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation: A Road Map for All Canadians**

Song Circle - Come and Sing!

Join us for an evening of singing familiar old folk songs, popular oldies and maybe learning some new ones, too. Bring your guitar, ukulele, banjo, tambourine, accordion, shakers, harmonica, penny whistle or Abyssinian nose flute – whatever – or use the keyboard available. Music stands will be helpful, too. If you have a copy of “Rise Up Singing,” the folksingers’ Bible, please bring it. Jay Moore will be leading and everyone will take turns requesting a song or introducing a song so choose some from the book or bring a dozen sheets with lyrics and chords (LARGE font please). We’ll go around the circle a few times and take a refreshment break in the middle of the evening.

We meet usually the third Sunday of every month (except July and August) at GRU at 7:30 pm, so this first quarter of 2016 we’ll meet January 17th, February 21st, and March 20th.

Since 15 to 20 people is a good number, feel free to bring your friends from outside our congregation who may be interested, too. Come and sing your hearts out!
Winter’s on its way! Come inside and join us for some warmth, inspiration, and exploration on your spiritual journey! This winter Quest, the Adult Religious Exploration committee, is offering a diverse selection of opportunities. Join us as we explore our relationship with First Nations peoples, examine the concept of ‘God’, understand Paganism, enjoy meditation, commune with Nature, go to the movies, and so much more! Read on, find something to spark your interest and join us!

Listen for further announcements and look for posters on the Quest board downstairs. Be sure to sign up for your program at the Quest table. From your Quest team: Anne Dahmer – chair, Barb Lefcourt, Lynda Maki, Lynn Rubinstein, Louise Sims, Rona Goldensher

TRUTH, HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

Justice Murray Sinclair has invited all Canadians to join in the journey of healing after presenting the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation committee. Grand River Unitarian is joining a Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC) initiative to participate in the dialogue. Quest is offering two unique opportunities:

KAIROS Blanket Exercise

As part of the CUC’s “Truth, Healing, and Reconciliation Reflection Guide”, the Quest committee will be piloting a special activity. This event will feature the KAIROS Blanket exercise, “an interactive learning experience that teaches the Indigenous rights history we’re rarely taught. It covers over 500 years of history in a one and a half hour participatory workshop. Participants take on the roles of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Standing on blankets that represent the land, they walk through pre-contact, treaty-making, colonization and resistance, led by Indigenous and non-Indigenous facilitators who represent narrators and European colonizers. Participants are drawn into the experience by reading scrolls and using cards that ultimately determine their outcomes.” This moving, interactive activity will be followed by a talking circle. This is a highly-acclaimed experience, be sure to come out and take part, on **Sunday, January 24th from 1 - 3:30 pm** (See Rona Goldensher for more information)

Walking with the Aboriginal Community

A three session workshop towards Understanding, Healing and Reconciliation coordinated by CUC and facilitated by Lynn Rubinstein and Lana Brasher, an Aboriginal Health and Wellness promoter. These workshops will offer an opportunity to explore issues of Truth and Reconciliation in depth and to work toward a new relationship between settlers and the Aboriginal community. (limit of 10 persons who need to commit to attending all three sessions, please. See Lynn Rubinstein for more information)

- Saturday, March 5th  10 am – 4 pm (Lunch provided)
- Saturday, March 12th  10 am – 12:30 pm
- Saturday, March 19th  10 am – 1 pm

TED Talks

Hart Walker will be hosting another in our series of Theme-related TED talks. Watch the Talk and join the discussion. This month’s theme is “Equity”: Tuesday February 16th  7:30 – 9:30 pm.

Spiritual Meditations in Nature

Looking for a chance to re-connect with Nature, explore your relationship with Mother Earth, wishing to walk and meditate out of doors? Join Mavis Kerr on a silent, spiritual walk through the woods, followed by fellowship and discussion. Upcoming dates will be announced. (See Mavis Kerr or Anne Dahmer for more information)
Neil Carver Discussions

In March, Neil Carver will lead us in an examination of the book “Reimagining God: The Faith Journey of a Modern Heretic” - a collection of essays that chronicle the intellectual and spiritual journey of Lloyd Geering.

In a recent address at GRU, Neil Carver described how he uses his agnostic Christian faith to confront existential questions, ambiguity, and the concept of “G-O-D”. Many of the resources that have influenced Neil are shared by others who likewise find the concept of God problematical. One of these is the New Zealand theologian Lloyd Geering who faced charges of heresy in 1967 for his controversial views. He considers Christian and Muslim fundamentalism to be ‘social evils’.

For those wanting to learn more about Geering in advance of the March sessions, his book is published by Polebridge Press, and is available on-line form the Westar Institute at http://www.westarstitute.org either in paperback or as an e-book. A podcast interview with Geering discussing his book is also available at http://religionforlife.podomatic.com/entry/2015-05-03T18_49_06_07_00

This stimulating offering will be of particular interest to those coming from a Christian background. Coming in March...watch for the announcements! (See Lynda Maki for more information)

GRUFF: Grand River Unitarian Film Friends

Do you like thought-provoking movies and chatting about them over a drink? Join this informal group as we venture out to the Princess or Apollo Cinemas to explore a good flick together. Watch for the announcements. (See Anne Dahmer for more information)

Paganism 101: A Unitarian Exploration of New Paganism

Paganism 101 is an experiential curriculum that will enable participants to conduct Pagan rituals on their own as independent practitioners. It introduces the practices, beliefs, and history of Modern Paganism spirituality, a nature-based worldview that is deeply rooted in Western Esoteric traditions. It is an active and powerful way to engage with Unitarianism’s Sixth Source- spiritual teachings of Earth-centred Traditions, that celebrates the Sacred Circle of Life and instructs us to live in harmony with the rhythms of Nature.

In Spring...watch for the announcements. (See Melissa Rockenfield for more information)

Meditation - the Seventh Principle Sangha

WEDNESDAY MEDITATION DISCONTINUED: The long-running 6:15 pm Wednesday night meditation group has sat its last sit! The weekly group, started by Rev. Jess, and continued these past two years by Brian Lowery and then Jack MacAulay, has been a GRU mainstay for nearly 7 years. We extend a huge THANK YOU for Brian and Jack and all our regular (and semi-regular) meditators over these years.

The Seventh Principle Sangha will continue as a monthly meditation event, please see below for dates. Those interested in a weekly sit might consider connecting with Shambhala Meditation who will be renting our hall on Wednesdays 7:30 – 9:30 pm.

Come join the SEVENTH PRINCIPLE SANGHA for monthly, extended meditation sessions with Rev Jess and Rona Goldensher. Join us for group sitting and walking meditation, tea, dharma talk and discussion. Drop-ins and beginners welcome. The next three sessions will take place on the first Monday of each month from 7:30 – 9:30 pm on January 4th (New Year session with candlelit walking meditation in the sanctuary), February 1st, and March 7th

“Breathing in, I calm body and mind. Breathing out, I smile. Dwelling in the present moment I know this is the only moment.” ~ Thich Nhat Hahn

(See Rona or Rev Jess for more information)

If you have a spiritual topic that you are interested in offering to the GRU congregation, please see the Quest committee to share your expertise!
The Women’s Book Group

The Women’s Book Group is a wonderful place to make friends and meet members of Grand River Unitarian. We are a lively and welcoming group. We usually meet the fourth Monday of the month, September through June, from 1:30 to 3:30 or 4 pm in the Boardroom at GRU. One or two volunteers play host, who provide refreshments. In December, we usually meet on an alternate Monday. Occasionally, where there is sufficient space, we are invited to meet at the host’s home. Traditionally, we plan the year’s selections in September. This past September we chose to discuss our “One Book, One Community” winner as well as plan the year’s reading. That is a format we are likely to follow. Below are the dates and titles we’ll be reading early in 2016.

Monday, January 25th, 1:30 pm in the Boardroom at GRU.
We will discuss the remarkable newly published, non-fiction work by Emily Urquhart, Beyond the Pale: Folklore, Family and the Mystery of our Hidden Genes. Motivated by the revelation that her daughter, Sadie, was born with the condition known as “albinism,” Urquhart “navigates new territory as a first-time parent of a child with a disability: she embarks on a three-year journey across North America and Africa (with her daughter in tow) to discover how we explain human differences, not through scientific facts or statistics but through a system of cultural beliefs. Part parenting memoir, part cultural critique and part travelogue, Beyond the Pale... takes the reader into dark and unknown territory in the search for enlightenment.” Please let Helga Tewfik, host, know if you plan to come to this get-together by phone 519-578-2583 or email stewfik@rogers.com.

Monday, February 22nd, 1:30 pm in the Boardroom at GRU
We will focus on The Nightingale, a novel by Kristin Hannah. Set in France, beginning in 1939, the “best-selling author captures the epic panorama of WWII and illuminates an intimate part of history seldom seen: the women’s war. “The Nightingale” tells the stories of two sisters, separated by years and experience, by ideals, passion and circumstance, each embarking on her own dangerous path toward survival, love, and freedom in German-occupied, war-torn France — a heartbreakingly beautiful novel that celebrates the resilience of the human spirit and the durability of women.” It is a novel for everyone, a novel for a lifetime. Please let host, Peggy Hagen, know if you plan to attend 519-744-6061 or phagen@golden.net.

Monday, March 21st, 1:30 pm in the Boardroom at GRU
In her recently published newest novel In the Unlikely Event, Judy Blume “creates a richly textured and moving story of three generations of families, friends and strangers, whose lives are profoundly changed by unexpected events: In 1987, Miri Ammerman returns to her hometown of Elizabeth, New Jersey, to attend a commemoration of the worst year of her life. Thirty-five years earlier, when Miri was fifteen, and in love for the first time, a succession of airplanes fell from the sky, leaving a community reeling. Against this backdrop of actual events that Blume experienced in the early 1950s, when airline travel was new and exciting and everyone dreamed of going somewhere, she paints a vivid portrait of a particular time and place — Nat King Cole singing “Unforgettable,” Elizabeth Taylor haircuts, young (and not-so-young) love, explosive friendships, A-bomb hysteria, rumours of Communist threat. And a young journalist who makes his name reporting tragedy. Through it all, one generation reminds another that life goes on.” Please contact host, Barb Lefcourt, if you plan to attend 519-886-7164 or handblefcourt@rogers.com

Women’s Book Group
Delegates Needed to Rep GRU!

Each year on Victoria Day weekend, the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC) holds its Annual General Meeting and a conference for Unitarians from around the country. Each congregation sends delegates to vote on matters of concern at the AGM. Our congregation’s size merits four delegates, to be supported at approximately $1000 each by the congregation. This year’s ACM will be held in sunny Vancouver, British Columbia, which makes for an exciting travel opportunity (but it should be noted that expenses will exceed congregational reimbursement).

Delegates are expected to attend the AGM and vote their conscience, to attend the Thursday evening plenary session if possible to discuss the resolutions, and to participate fully in the conference. The conference portion is also open to non-delegates, but GRU cannot financially support further attendees. Delegates must be members of the congregation and at least 18 years of age. Anyone who is interested should fill out the one-page application (which will be posted at grandriverunitarian.ca) and give it to Janis Collins, Board President, by February 7th, 2016.

From the CUC’s Web site: “Conference 2016 will focus on better connections among UUs, greater public awareness, and deepening spirituality – on Bolder Ways of Being. Over the weekend, Unitarians will explore sharing, the risk (and rewards) of telling our stories, and connections.”

See http://cuc.ca/vancouver-will-host-2016-national-conference for more information.

What: “Bolder Ways of Being,” the CUC’s 2016 ACM
Where: Vancouver, British Columbia
When: May 20-22, 2016 (Friday through Sunday, with Thursday and Monday as travel days)
Why: To represent GRU at a national level, to help shape the Canadian Unitarian experience, and to learn from and share with Unitarians from across the land.
Application deadline: February 7th, 2016

“One of the reasons it’s important for me to write about war is I really think that the concept of war, the specifics of war, the nature of war, the ethical ambiguities of war, are introduced too late to children. I think they can hear them, understand them, know about them, at a much younger age without being scared to death by the stories.”

— Suzanne Collins
From the Nominating Committee

A total of four seats on the Board of Trustees will be open at the February 28th, 2016 AGM. Three current Board members (Colin Read, Louise Sims, and Kristen Wilson) are completing their first 3-year term, and are willing to stand for re-election for a second 3-year term. As such, the Nominating Committee is nominating Colin Read, Louise Sims, and Kristen Wilson for a second 3-year term. However, any GRU member can run for these seats.

For the fourth seat, Art Phelan is stepping down after completing two 3-year terms on the Board, and the Nominating Committee is nominating Mark Paul for this seat. Mark has been a member of Grand River Unitarian for over 25 years, and has been active on a number of committees in that time, including Ministerial Search and Financial Stewardship. Mark’s work background is in the co-operative housing sector, where he designed and delivered training for Boards and committees.

FOR THIS SEAT ONLY - the Board is proposing that this seat’s first term be 2 years. Its second term remains at 3 years. Normally, each term is 3 years. However, 4 terms are expected to expire for the 2019 Board, meaning that over half the Board will be brand new trustees for 2019, with 4 of 7 seats will need to be filled with new Board members. To ease the search and transition processes for the 2019 Board, the first term for this seat would be for 2 years, so that only 3 new Board members would be joining at that time. This proposed change to the length of the first term will be voted on at the February 28th, 2016 AGM.

If you are interested in pursuing an independent nomination for any of these 4 seats, contact the Nominating Committee for an application package and the process information for independent nomination. Requirements for Board members are as follows:

1. Ability to prepare for, participate and contribute in meetings, addressing all issues in a comprehensive, thoughtful and efficient manner.
2. General understanding of church infrastructure, committees/teams, yearly events, processes, budgets and procedures.
3. Excellent verbal communication skills.
4. Excellent interpersonal skills.
5. Ability to attend monthly meetings on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7:30 pm.
6. A member of Grand River Unitarian Congregation.

Please note the following important dates:

- Sunday, January 24th, 2015: Submission deadline of the application package
- January 28th, 2016: Nominating Committee publishes information about all candidates so that you can learn more about them
- February 28th, 2016: At the AGM, congregation members vote on the following:
  - Fourth seat: The length of the first term from 3 years to 2 years
  - The candidates for the four seats on the Board

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact the Nominating Committee: Jessica Bayne, Jane Bell, and Bruce Richter.

GRU Publicity

I am often asked questions about how we might best share the good news about Grand River Unitarian Congregation. The best publicity is the kind we cannot buy -- it’s YOU! Be sure you “like” and “follow” the congregation’s Facebook page, visit and “like” our posts often, and please consider sharing them on your own timeline and feed. A BIG THANKS to Andrea Deering who manages our publicity.

Not on Facebook? No problem . . .why not ‘cut and paste’ an item of particular interest from our weekly announcements and email it to your friends, co-workers, and neighbours. YOUR reasons for supporting GRU are the best ways to promote Canadian Unitarianism.
Sunday Services - January 2016

Rev. Jessica P. Rodela and YOU.
We start the new year with our annual Fire Communion sharing service. Bring a poem or anecdote to share in this interactive service as we let go of the old and welcome the new.

January 10, 2016 - “What We Are in the Dark.”
What is “character” and how is it created?

January 17, 2016 - “REQUIEM: Live to the Last.”
Rev. Jessica P. Rodela
Wayne Dyer said: “Stop acting as if life is a rehearsal. Live this day as if it were your last. The past is over and gone. The future is not guaranteed.” Today we pay tribute to those we lost in 2015.
(Today we celebrate a New Member Ceremony.)

Brian Carwana, Director of Encounter World Religions Centre.
Running a world religions centre? That’s easy. Doing a PhD on evangelicals? That’s a bit harder. A reflection on being confronted with boundaries, insularity and what research says about what people and groups you don’t agree with have to teach you.
Brian directs the Encounter World Religions Centre. Encounter explores the people, places, practices and philosophies of the world’s religions and has reached 100,000 people. Brian is also close to completing a PhD in religion at the University of Toronto which he began right after the dinosaurs were wiped out. He hopes it will be worth it.

January 31, 2016 - “Dystopia Myopia.”
Rev. Jessica P. Rodela & the Spirit of Life Choir, directed by Curtis Dueck

Sunday Services - February 2016

February 7, 2016 - “Monkey Mind”
Rev. Jessica P. Rodela
This week marks the beginning of the Year of the Monkey in Chinese zodiac. Buddhist teachings liken our habitual minds to being “just as a monkey, swinging through a forest wilderness, grabs a branch. Letting go of it, it grabs another branch. Letting go of that, it grabs another one. Letting go of that, it grabs another one. In the same way, what’s called ‘mind,’ ‘intellect,’ or ‘consciousness’ by day and by night arises as one thing and ceases as another.”

February 14, 2016 - “Not OK, CUPID.”
Rev. Jessica P. Rodela
Is there any holiday more prone to vulnerability than Valentine’s Day? Movies and pop music promise our fulfillment through romantic love, but what are our real experiences of love and acceptance?
Sunday Services - February 2016

February 21, 2016
Kate Green of the Unitarian Service Committee returns to our pulpit to challenge us to live out our values.

February 28, 2016 - “Stonecatcher.”
Rev. Jessica P. Rodela & the Spirit of Life Choir, directed by Curtis Dueck
How might being a Unitarian Universalist prepare you to be a stonecatcher instead of a stone thrower? *(Members, please plan to stay for lunch and our Annual General Meeting today.)*

Sunday Services - March 2016

March 6, 2016 - “The Essential We.”
Rev. Jessica P. Rodela
Martin Buber wrote “Spirit is not in the I, but between I and Thou. It is not like the blood that circulates in you, but like the air in which you breathe.”

March 13, 2016
*Don’t forget, today is the time change!*  
See future announcements for a description of this morning’s service.

March 20, 2016 - “Chasing the Sun.”
Rev. Jessica P. Rodela
I spent a week last summer at a meditation retreat. There, surrounded by vistas suitable for watching the sunset, I managed to miss the view again and again.

March 27, 2016 - “Easter: On Walking the Stations of the Cosmos.”
Rev. Jessica P. Rodela
Thomas Berry is a self-described “cosmologist” and “Earth Scholar” who advocates a deep understanding of the evolving universe as a necessity for our continued human functioning on the planet. Join Rev. Jess in this Easter exploration of ecospirituality.

Grand River Unitarian Congregation

Join us for Worship Services Sunday mornings at 10:30 am. Our building is wheelchair accessible and childcare options are provided.
299 Sydney Street South
Kitchener, Ontario
By Bus: Route 8 from Charles Street Terminal or Fairview Park Mall and exit on Courtland Avenue at Sydney Street