

Unitarians encourage development of individual philosophy

By DIANNE RINEHART

"Religion according to our own interpretation," is the philosophy of the South Peel Unitarian Congregation, says Helen Tracy, co-ordinator and past chairman of the church. "We believe in everyone developing his own philosophy of life," she said. Everyone in the congregation has his own answer to religion but it's better to be with others in an organization than on your own for the growth of your beliefs. We stimulate each other in our ideas, she explained.

Mrs. Tracy says there are certain "basic attitudes" that are common to all Unitarian Universalists.

There is an emphasis on this life and this world, she said. Some may believe in life after death, but there is a general emphasis on this world. "Because of this belief, Unitarians tend to be involved in social actions," the co-ordinator said. "We are trying to make this world a better place."

Mrs. Tracy went on to explain that Unitarians take their inspiration from any source available and don't confine it to religious writings. "We get our inspiration from great men and women, religious or otherwise," she said.

Quotations in our hymn book range from the Greek philosophers to Buddha, scientists and Jesus, the co-ordinator added.

The Unitarian Universalist Church has no creed the congregation must follow, Mrs. Tracy said. There are no set beliefs we insist on people following. Unitarians also accept change, Mrs. Tracy said. "We recognize that evolution, development and change are a natural state."

Finally, Mrs. Tracy summarized Unitarians appreciate diversity among themselves. "We think it's an advantage and a great enrichment to our group to have people who are not all cast from the same mould. It makes life much more interesting although sometimes more difficult," she said.

The Unitarian Church can help foster social action, Mrs. Tracy said. The church can organize group action, or it can act in a supporting and inspiring role, she said.

Mrs. Tracy said she preferred the second role. It makes our members effective in the community while bringing unique attitudes into the church, she explained.

As an example of Unitarian social action prompted from the congregation members, Mrs. Tracy described the Toronto branch of the Elizabeth Fry Society.

It was a woman's organization Mrs. Tracy chaired within the church which founded the society in 1951, she said.

We were interested in penal reform and a speaker explained to us that there was a need for women to take care of female convicts as they were released back into the community.

We acted by getting the support of the community first, Mrs. Tracy explained. We had a meeting of all churches, faiths and service organizations and by July of '52 we were chartered with a board that represented portions of the whole community.

Our organization also participated in the formation of the provincial branch of the society, Mrs. Tracy added.

In 1956 the Unitarian Church founded the Toronto Memorial Society. We decided to do something about expensive funerals. Again we got people from other churches involved, she said.

The society which now has over 16,000 members seeks to provide a simple but dignified funeral service at a reasonable price for members.

Plans are made before the stress and emotional strain of an actual death in much the same way you would make out a will. The society describes itself as a "watchdog in the whole field of funeral legislation." It arranges funerals with undertakers who will co-operate with the plan.

Although few people are members of the Unitarian Universalist Church and few have heard of it, Claretion Publication, a publication by the Catholic Church, recognizes its importance, saying, "the influence of the Unitarian Universalists must be reckoned as a major force in contemporary American life . . . It (the church) has a well-educated ministry, a distinguished publishing program and an influence out of all proportion to its numbers."

The booklet adds "no religious denomination has and does provide a greater number of national figures (American) than the Unitarian Universalists."

The results of a 1967 study show only three per cent of adult Unitarians think of God as a supernatural being while 40 per cent think of God as love, evolution and other natural processes.

About 90 per cent of adult Unitarians repudiate any belief in personal immortality.

History backs up Mrs. Tracy's view that Unitarians are involved in social improvement activities because of their beliefs. Universalists went on record in 1790 as opposing human slavery. They were the first religious body to take this stand.

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee was organized in 1940 to aid refugees

from Nazi tyranny. The committee which conducts its projects on a nonsectarian basis currently works in projects from civil rights to medical programs in Third World countries.

The Unitarian Church formed in the 16th century originally as a contradiction to the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The Universalist ideology grew out of the belief that God could not punish man in hell eternally, while the Unitarians believed man was too good to be damned.

The two groups, whose beliefs have grown together over the years, became one church in 1961.

Unitarian Universalists of today are generally wealthier and more active in community affairs than those of other denominations and six out of 10 are university graduates, according to the Catholic publication on the church.

Mrs. Tracy confirmed this view of the church. She says the South Peel Congregation has an unusually high number of talented members.

The Mississauga Church currently has no minister. It operates under a board of management and has different weekly speakers on various subjects each Sunday morning.

Lecture subjects "always have ethical and philosophical content and implications," Mrs. Tracy said. Topics range from a series on the future and its implications to speakers from different religions who explain their views and beliefs.

The constitution of South Peel's congregation lists as its purposes and objectives the pursuit of the free and unrestricted search for truth, providing fellowship, promoting the strengthening and growth of liberal religion and striving for the ennoblement and well being of all mankind through the application of the principles of the congregation.



Members of the Unitarian Congregation of South Peel built their own church at 84 South Service Rd. in 1956. Unitarian Universalists, unlike other religions, have no set dogma of what they must believe in. Most do not believe in God as a supernatural being but believe in the things associated with god such as peace and love.



Informality is the flavor inside the South Peel Unitarian Church where Sunday Services are held in a spirit of learning with discussion.

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Distress Line reports alcoholism breeds new problems, slows solutions

Distress Line, Mississauga, reports that alcoholism is a problem that "gives birth to many other problems and makes solutions more remote."

The December newsletter says alcoholism is one problem that attacks every economic level in Mississauga.

Based on their calls, members of Distress Line feel people drink to escape problems such as a bad, lonely, or abusive marriage, financial problems or a dull life in the suburbs. They say that people feel trapped in an unpleasant life style, perhaps due to lack of education, opportunity, money problems or young children — or a personal background that has made them fearful to change. Often people are unable to assess realistic alternatives to their present condition. Finally people drink due to cultural pressures. Peo-

ple think alcohol is useful to make up for personality deficiencies, to loosen up at a party, to ease boredom, loneliness or personal problems — to be part of the crowd.

Rather than looking for solutions inwardly, people in our society look for solutions outside themselves, says Tom Ratterman of Distress Line. Alcohol, aspirin, counselling, travel or other diversions are sought rather than doing some internal housekeeping on our own.

Out of 137 sample first-time callers to Distress Line from January to October of '76, the greatest number of age-pinned-down calls came from men in the 20 to 30 year age range. They drank, surprisingly, because of loneliness and isolation. An equally large number of calls came from women in the 40 to 50 year age range, with problems perhaps due to menopause, or that particular period of life.

Of the other groups calling Distress Line, older men described problems due to their climacteric, while most females calling in complained that marital or menopause problems were causing their drinking, according to

Distress Line workers.

The results of the sampling of calls would seem to indicate that slightly more females suffer from alcoholism than men.

Distress Line is always in need of volunteers and contributions of at least \$3

give you voting privileges at the annual meeting.

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Economist will talk

Variety is the spice . . . Thora Dolan, home economist with Dominion Stores, Square One will discuss how to get the best food value for your dollars at Central Library, 110 Dundas St. W. in Mississauga, on Thursday, Jan. 6 and Friday, Jan. 7, at 10:30 a.m. and at Clarkson-Lorne Park Library, 1474 Truscott Dr., Mississauga, at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 11.

She'll point out that fresh food has only a very slight nutritional edge over canned or frozen, and that lean meat is more nutritious than fat, but that most people stay healthy by eating a variety of foods.