

**LINDA THOMSON CANADIAN UNITARIAN COUNCIL CUC RETIREMENT  
LYLA MIKLOS, CUC LAY CHAPLAINCY COMMITTEE MEMBER  
SPEECH GIVEN JUN 7, 2025 AT THE CUC OFFICES IN TORONTO, ONTARIO**

Hello. My name is Lyla Miklos. My pronouns are she and her. I am a member of The First Unitarian Church of Hamilton and sit on the Canadian Unitarian Council's Lay Chaplaincy Committee.

I first met Linda Thomson over twenty years ago when I was then known as a "friend" of Hamilton's Unitarian Church. I would later become a member and serve as Co-Chair of our Worship Committee, a Lay Chaplain and now a member of the Board. I would keep my church in the "friend zone" for quite a while. As a recovering Jehovah's Witness I still had an allergic reaction to organized religion.

Not even a year into being a "friend" of the church, it was September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. I was working at the time just around the corner from here at 299 Queen Street West for CHUM Television.

I walked into the Space: The Imagination Station offices with images of New York City's iconic Twin Towers on fire on every television screen. I couldn't even compute what I was seeing. It was like something out of one of the disaster films our station would air. A friend of mine from Hamilton had just finished his overnight shift at one of Toronto's downtown hotels and gave me a ride home as rumours had spread that GO Transit was going to shut down.

I worked from home listening to classical music while I programmed movies and TV shows about aliens and wizards. I received an e-mail from my local Unitarian church later that day that they were going to hold a special candle light vigil service in the evening for us to come together as a community. Once I finished working, I decided to clear my head and walk over. Sadly, despite the service and the communing with others I wasn't feeling better. The grief was overwhelming. It felt like the end of the world.

I was sitting on the couch in the foyer of the church feeling dejected and hopeless. It was in that moment that I remember Linda and her husband Gary coming towards me. I think they sensed my fragile mental health from across the room. They had a long check in with me at the church. Then they drove me home. Then they made sure once I got home that I was truly OK.

That demonstration of leadership led by love and empathy in that moment on 9/11 captures the essence of who Linda is in the more than two decades I have had the privilege of knowing her.

Being a member of Linda's home congregation has allowed me to witness and be a part of her many milestones. Her installation as a Unitarian Universalist Minister. Her daughter's wedding. Her grandson's welcoming to our congregation. Her knee surgery recovery.

I am pretty certain that Linda and I's Myers Briggs personality types are likely polar opposite (ESTJ for years, but lately coming up as an ENTJ), but nevertheless we have found ways to clearly communicate with each other. I value that Linda is always professional and adult in the way she navigates life and her many leadership roles. But I also value her sincere joy that is grounded in a strong sense of meaning and calm centeredness.

When I was brought on board the CUC's Lay Chaplaincy Committee by Linda and former Committee Member Yvette Roberts I got to appreciate her in yet another way. Linda and I had both served our congregation as Lay Chaplains. A UU Calling that is uniquely Canadian with lay members providing rites of passage to the wider community. Linda's depths of UU knowledge were a valuable resource for our entire committee. Her expertise and presence will be sorely missed. She leaves behind some very big shoes to fill.

When Linda announced to the Committee that she would be retiring from the CUC I did ask her if she still planned on continuing to serve as a UU Minister and she said yes she was. I'm thrilled that she will be serving the First Unitarian Church of Toronto as their Summer Minister while they undergo their search process.

Linda and I have gone through many changes personally over the past two decades, but we have also seen our faith community go through many changes too. Whether it has been the many Ministers or Interim Ministers that have preached from the pulpit at our home congregation. The many changes in staff, leadership and headquarters at the CUC. Even the bittersweet time when Linda was laid off from the CUC due to budget cuts.

The struggles all congregations went through during the COVID-19 Pandemic and still haven't quite recovered from.

The adoption of the CUC's 8<sup>th</sup> Principle.

"We, the member congregations of the Canadian Unitarian Council, covenant to affirm and promote individual and communal action that accountably dismantles racism and systemic barriers to full inclusion in ourselves and our institutions."

A call to action that speaks to the moment, but also uplifts our original 7 Principles by reframing them through an anti-racism lens:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part;

As an ex-Jehovah's Witness, baptized Catholic, Star Trek Humanist and Feminist Pagan these principles are a mantra that speak to my very being.

Linda gave a sermon entitled "Nothing Stays The Same" last year in which she shared this observation.

*These are trying and troubled times. There is much that makes a retreat to old patterns and their perceived safety seem compelling. But we know that these trying and troubling times call for new responses. We don't want to spend our time shoring up structures that don't work anymore. Loren Mead, an organizational consultant who specialized in religious community, said, "Every generation is tempted to preserve the structures rather than the insights of the previous generation ... the critical task is to break through the structures and help the insights—if they are still viable—find structures more adequate for a new time."*

*So, what is a leader to do? Organizations resist change, even when the change is an ever-present reality. There is no staying the same, try as we might. It is hard, and for many of us, the answer is easily found. Open your website, look at your brochure, read your mission statement. Almost all organizations have already said what they want to do and achieve and how they want to be in the world.*

*The work of the leader is to remind people, likely starting with themselves, of where it is they intend to go. And then, take a breath, together, and begin the work of being the congregation that you know you want to be. Outcomes are not certain. The work of change, of living into ideals is hard, because even as you start, having assessed the situation, things will change again. It is an adventure, and in my experience, adventures are better undertaken with friends.*

Linda thank you for helping Unitarian Universalists across the country with our ever-changing world. Thank you for being a navigator filled with the wisdom to know that our faith can never be a static one, but must evolve, grow and mature in order to bring forward that hopeful vision of humanity's future that I this Trekkie and Unitarian longs to see.

And as I am also the host of the radio show Centre Stage on 93.3 CFMU, a celebration of musicals from both the stage and screen, and have been watching the trailer to Wicked: For Good on an endless loop since it came out earlier this week you know I had to end this with at least one Broadway song.

So Linda ... "Because I knew you. I have been changed, for good."