

Biography of Rev. Dr. Phillip Hewett

Phillip Hewett has been minister emeritus of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver since 1991, at which time he concluded a 35-year ministry at the church.

He grew up in England, in the Dorset countryside portrayed in the novels of Thomas Hardy. Raised as a member of the Church of England, he became a Unitarian at the age of 17. His university career at Oxford was interrupted by war service in the RAF, which brought him for the first time to Canada for training as an air navigator. Returning to Oxford, he completed his BA and MA degrees and trained for the Unitarian ministry, supplementing his studies with a year at Harvard, graduating STM (Master of Theology). He was subsequently awarded the degree of STD by Starr King School, the Unitarian college at Berkeley.

In 1951 he married Margaret Smith from London, who had been president of the Unitarian Young People's League. His first ministerial position was a year as assistant at the Unitarian Church of Montreal, following which he returned to England for a two-year stint at the centuries-old Unitarian Church of Ipswich. While there he received the call to Vancouver, and began his ministry here in September 1956. It was during this ministry that the present church was built in 1964.



2006: Phillip visiting our partner church in Brassó, Romania

Over the years he held a number of responsible positions in the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), and was one of the founders of the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC), on the board of which he served for three separate terms. He has also been an active participant in the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) and the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU). In 1992 he was the recipient of the Annual Award for Distinguished Service from the UUA. He has made eight visits to Vancouver's partner church in Transylvania, as well as to Unitarians in India, New Zealand, Australia and a number of European countries. One of his books (Racovia) tells the story of the early

Unitarian movement in Poland, to which he led a tour in 2002.

He is a former president of both the Canadian and the British Unitarian Historical Societies, and vicepresident of their counterpart in the United States. He was for a term president of the board of trustees for the Meadville/Lombard Theological School in Chicago, and adjunct faculty member at the Vancouver School of Theology. A founder of the Northwest Unitarian Wilderness Society, he was for a time its president, a role in which he also served the BC Civil Liberties Association and the Family Planning Association of BC. Local boards on which he has served include those of Vancouver Community College, the Memorial Society of BC, the Vancouver Chamber Choir, the Family Service Agency of Greater Vancouver and the Pastoral Institute of BC. He was chaplain to Vancouver City Council in 1977. Currently he serves as a member of the Council of Elders of the David Suzuki Foundation, and over the years has been active in groups working for peace as well as environmental concerns.

He has been a contributor to many symposia and journals, and to the Canadian Encyclopedia, the Dictionary of Canadian Biography and the Dictionary of Unitarian Universalist Biography. Author of a number of books, the title of one, *The Unitarian Way*, indicates his view that the basis of religion is to be found, not in "beliefs", but in following a Way, indicated also in a recent sermon: "Come up Higher". The latter also reflects one of his favourite leisure activities, hiking and climbing; other relaxations are gardening and time with children and grandchildren.



2009: One of Phillip's favourite outdoor activities