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**The Children's Chapel, Unitarian Church of Montreal:  
Two Case Studies of the Role of the Mural in the Transformation of the Room into a Sacred Space**

**Tara Bissett**

**A Thesis**

**in**

**The Department**

**of**

**Art Education**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts at  
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## **Abstract**

**The Children's Chapel, Unitarian Church of Montreal:  
Two Case Studies of the Role of the Mural in the Transformation of the Room into a Sacred Space**

**Tara Bissett**

In the Summer of 1998, I painted a mural in the Children's Chapel at the Unitarian Church of Montreal. What was once a plain room with little atmosphere has become, somehow, a magical space. It's clear that the mural is appreciated and acknowledged as having played a major role in this transformation. But *how* has it played that role? Two parent-child pairs were interviewed in order to gain insights about the role of the mural in the chapel and how it made a difference to the room for people who use it on a regular basis.

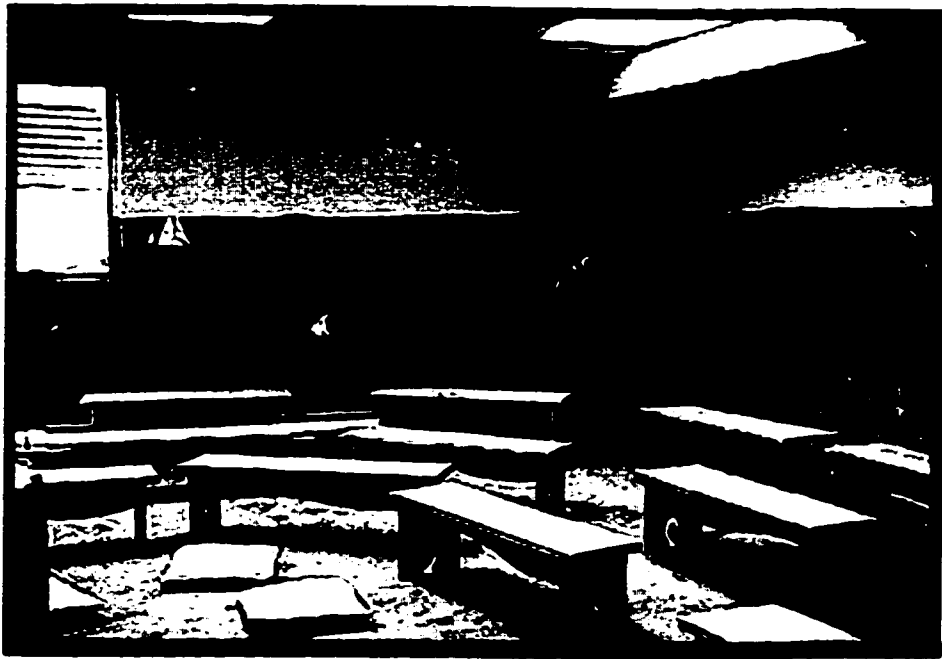
This is a qualitative study of how the mural is believed to have transformed the chapel room into a sacred space. The emphasis is placed on the children's responses, with occasional references to the parents' when appropriate. Due to the specific nature of the sample, results are not meant to be generalizable to any other population, but rather to serve as a point of reference to others interested in similar situations.

## **Acknowledgements**

**I would like to thank my family for their constant love and support.**



## **The Children's Chapel**



**Unitarian Church of Montreal**

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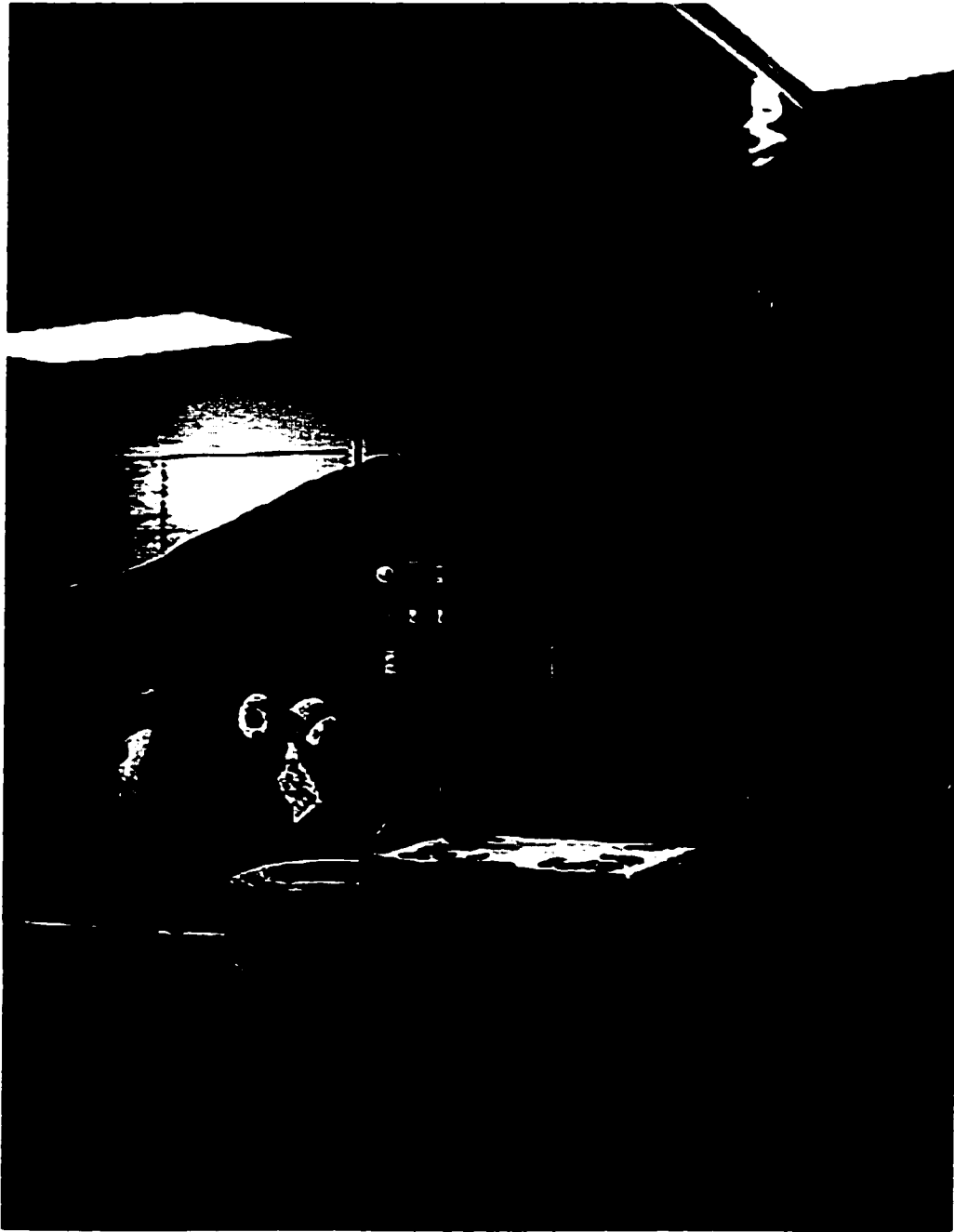
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### Children's Chapel Mural, Unitarian Church of Montreal

Last summer I undertook an 800<sup>2</sup> foot mural in a children's chapel at the Unitarian Church of Montreal (5035 De Maisonneuve West, Montreal, Qc). The room had been designated as the 'Children's Chapel' since the construction of the church two years previously, at which time it was not considered to have much atmosphere. In fact, it had often been commented that it was the 'worst' room in the building, with a very distracting support column in the middle. It has since become one of the favorite spots in the church and, transformed into a tree, the column is now the central gathering area (Figure 1). The chapel serves not only the children, but is seen also by adults as a special gathering place: several church groups along with outside groups have requested the room for their activities. What was once a plain room with little atmosphere has become, somehow, a magical space. It's clear that the mural is appreciated and acknowledged as having played a major role in this transformation. But *how* has it played that role? *How has the mural helped to transform this ordinary space into a Children's chapel?* An answer to this question was sought by soliciting the opinion of those persons who use the room on a regular basis. By interviewing two parent-child pairs, I attempted to understand what they feel about the mural, and how they feel it changes the space. How does it make a difference to the room for the people who use it regularly?



**Figure 1. Central Gathering Tree and Altar with Salvaged Ice Storm Branches**

## Introduction

It should be understood that the Unitarian Church is quite different from other churches. Although it is based on Christian tradition, there is no doctrine as such. There is no one God who is celebrated or honoured. Nor are there sacred objects such as relics, in the sense of many other religions. The Unitarian community could be described as a humanist, liberal faith community which is constantly questioning everything from moral and spiritual subjects, to political and social issues. Debate and variety of viewpoints are key elements that are cherished by this community. In the services, when spiritual or religious themes are addressed, one will find that ideas are pulled from many different world religions and theologies; every faith has something to offer. Hung in the entrance hall is a display presenting the 'sources' of this faith. Incorporated into this image, are symbols from several major religions from around the world. It is therefore no surprise that the theme for the chapel mural is not one which depicts known sacred figures or objects from the perspective of a western religion, but rather represents a concept which the children learnt from Native spirituality: the notion of the Six Directions. This concept addresses the spirits of the North, South, East, West, up and down; thus honouring the earth and all living creatures with which we share the planet.

The chapel is part of the religious education department of the church. The goal of the chapel is to provide a quiet, sacred space for children. Once a month, a service is held in the chapel, alternating between a children's service and a family worship in which the parents are

present. It is a place which is meant to be special; a place in which people should feel comfortable. It is both a spiritual space and a learning space. It is meant especially for children, although adults use it as well.

#### Definition of the word 'sacred'

It is perhaps appropriate at this point to discuss how the word 'sacred' is used in Unitarianism. The word 'sacred' may carry different meanings and significance to people of different faiths. In the Unitarian faith, however, there is no specific definition for 'sacred'. I spoke with Ray Drennan (personal communication, February 26, 1999), the minister of the Unitarian Church of Montreal, about the meanings of this term. Essentially, Ray Drennan defines 'sacred' as the quality of something which moves or touches a person. He believes that sacred moments and events occur all the time and it is up to us to be open to them. For example, a sacred event can be something as simple as a child laughing. He also talked about how sacred moments often occur for people when they are out in nature. Sacred is something which is special and, perhaps, spiritual. It can happen or be present in various ways for different people. For the purposes of this study, I will use the terms 'sacred' and 'special' interchangeably.

#### Information on the Chapel

In the winter of 1998, it was brought to my attention that the Religious Education Committee at the church was looking for someone to paint the children's chapel. After presenting my portfolio and discussing mural ideas, I was awarded the contract. The chapel was intended to be a special or sacred room with a quiet, comfortable atmosphere. The committee

had decided already on the theme (the six directions). At that time, they had four large poster size canvases pinned up around the room depicting the north, west, east, and south. There were a few elements that had to be included in the mural. Animals were one of the main things the children had asked for, so it was important that animals be represented in the mural. The emergency exit had to remain clearly indicated as well(Figure 2). Other than that, the design was left to my discretion, with a few suggestions along the way. I recommended, for example, that we produce a Canadian version of the directions instead of trying to represent a more global perspective, One of the main concerns of the committee was how to deal with the support column in the center of the room. When I suggested it be made into a tree, they loved the idea. I had a team of volunteer parents and children help with the preparatory work. In about a day, everything was prepared for me to start on the mural itself: the floor was covered, edges taped off, walls sanded, primed and base-coated, and the ceiling painted blue.

As the scenes of the mural took shape, a few additions were made. About a month into the project, it was decided that the Seven Principles be included on the walls. This presented an interesting challenge in terms of finding ways to include each of the principles in a way that they would be fully integrated in with the mural, and not simply painted on top of it. These additions were mostly ideas from children and parents about different animals that should be included. One father insisted that there be a snake or lizard because he felt reptiles were under-appreciated. Someone else loved loons, so one was added. Another child kept reminding me that there had to be bats. I tried as much as possible to incorporate these suggestions. It was very important that





**Figure 2. Emergency Exit**

they felt it was their chapel, and that they had a say in its creation. (I did have to draw the line at the idea of a tiger walking through the what field!).

Although the purpose of this study is not to prove whether the room has been successful in its goal of becoming a sacred space, I do feel it important to briefly give evidence that it has indeed become such a space. Above all, the space is meant to be sacred. I've received countless comments, directly and indirectly, about how special the place is to people. One woman told me she was in the chapel with her "Goddess" group. At one point, she realized she was no longer listening to the speaker because she had become so absorbed in the sunset on one of the walls. She equated herself to a sponge, which was soaking up the scene, becoming completely enveloped by it. Although this situation could be interpreted as the woman being distracted by the painting, it nonetheless provides an indication of a spiritual experience involving the mural. In a sense, she lost her concept of place and time: a key element in meditation and spirituality. In meditation, you become involved in things outside yourself, even if only for a brief moment.

The fact that other groups have preferred to use the room for their activities is further evidence in itself that the space has become something special, something sacred. Now, it is a place which creates a certain ambiance or energy, conducive to quiet, spiritual, and meditative activities. Other groups using the room for their activities include the 'Great Thinkers', who meet there to discuss the work of various philosophers, theologians and other philosophical subjects, and a Buddhist Meditation group which meets there to meditate. The nature of these

groups' activities shows how the room seems to attract certain types of events that have a spiritual or meditative focus.

These are all examples of adults' use of the chapel. Do children relate to the space in the same way? Here is one example of the chapel being used for a sacred event by a child. Anyone who has, or has had, pets knows the deep sadness and sense of loss that occurs when that animal dies. Following the death of a young boy's pet, the chapel was used for a very meaningful private memorial. How appropriate that this child chose to say goodbye to his pet within the comforting atmosphere of the Children's Chapel, where various animals of all kinds are represented within the mural.

#### Personal and Professional Reasons for Choosing This Area of Study

From the moment I painted a dragon on my bedroom wall at the age of 16, I've been passionate about murals and other decorative effects. Over the past several years, I have worked on many mural and decorative painting projects. When the opportunity to paint an ambitious large-scale mural in the Children's Chapel at the Unitarian Church of Montreal was presented, I jumped at the chance. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to do what I love best while at the same time making a difference in the lives of the children in a community I care about. Given my long-time involvement in mural art and the importance of this latest project, it seems only natural that my thesis should focus on the Children's Chapel mural.

### Why Was This Research Worth Doing?

Traditionally, images have been used for didactic purposes in many areas of life, including education. Lessons in moral development are taught both directly and indirectly throughout our lives, but these are especially important in the early years when children are most receptive and impressionable. If a person is to trust, they have to learn trust as a child, if a person is to love and accept love, they must also experience this as a child (Gleitman 1991). Regardless of which faith one is brought up in, certain moral beliefs are always passed on from generation to generation. For the most part, these beliefs, although diverse, tend to center around such concepts as peace and goodwill.

Through the influence of social theory, multiculturalism, and contemporary principles of inclusive education, art education has been recognizing more and more that it has a social responsibility in addition to its educational objectives. Essentially, “it takes a village to raise a child”, as the saying goes. I believe that art education is part of that village and so shares that responsibility. There is much literature on how different environments have been used to promote different types of responses, feelings or behaviours; from learning, to having a spiritual experience (Mauck, 1996, McGrath, 1978, McKay, 1992, Mueller, 1979, Turner, 1979). These environments include classrooms and spiritual spaces, both of which are learning environments.

My library research shows that there is little information about Children’s chapels or children’s spiritual/sacred spaces. There is however, research into related topics such as children’s spaces and the importance for children to have a space they can call their own: a

bedroom, a playroom, a classroom. This area of the research literature is worthy of consideration. By following this line of study, a grounding for my discussion of children's spiritual and sacred experiences and of the role of the classroom and sacred spaces in this regard is provided.

### Limits of This Research

My research into the impact of this mural can be useful in other settings as well. This qualitative study focused on a specific community so the results of this study cannot be generalized to other communities. However, others may wish to investigate how my study applies to their own situations, whether these are chapels, community centres or classrooms. Others may also be inspired by the experiences of the Unitarian Church of Montreal to create similar spaces for children's use.

First and foremost, this was a case study from which I hoped to learn and provide interesting insights about the individuals interviewed and their perceptions about the Children's Chapel. Case studies can provide a starting point for other research, but their results cannot be applied as is to other similar populations.

A second limit of this research project, is that it was impossible to distinguish, from other factors, the degree to which the mural alone transformed the room. Certainly the carpet, furniture, and other objects play a role as well, in dramatically transforming this space. However, what the exact influence of these elements is cannot be definitively determined. It

suffices to say that both the mural and the furnishings together have played a role in transforming this space.

Thirdly, there was bound to be an impact on the information collected due to the fact that the informants in this study knew that I was the artist who had painted the chapel. By conducting semi-structured interviews, I hoped the participants would feel free to talk about the issues they cared about and that I would be able to get some indication of their points of view.

### Literature Review

I have identified several different sources of literature. One area focuses on sacred and spiritual art, and includes information on how art is used in sacred settings and affects spiritual atmospheres. Reference is also made to murals and interior design in the creation of special spaces. Lastly, the use of objects in the creation of sacred spaces is referred to.

Marchita Mauck (1996), discusses how art affects everyone in some way and causes us to react, "...art has the power to engage, even transform the viewer...the mere act of looking at an art object draws us into some sort of interaction"(p. 22). What this interaction is, is not always known or understood. Mauck goes on, "Through most of the Christian era, the spiritual dimension of art--its ability to touch the soul and transform the life of the viewer--has been acknowledged". Throughout the ages, this transformative quality has been acknowledged by many, "Throughout [time] people recognized that art can speak to our inner being in ways that

profoundly transform us"(p. 23). Modern churches provide ambiance without necessarily providing a transforming interaction however. This is because the art it presents has lost its human touch and, "though expensive [was] often inferior...mass produced [art]...". It is believed that art must be a personal thing in order to have a significant transformative effect on a community, "works conceived by an artist for a specific congregation and with a particular purpose in mind stand a much greater chance of uplifting the viewer to a new awareness...". Churches were once patrons of the arts. Artists such as Michelangelo and Bernini, "[knew] full well that people are most touched when they [were] drawn into the holy by an appeal to their own human experience"(p. 23-24). Churches need to return to the tradition of original quality art which "nurtures their spirituality, church people need to remember our tradition of providing places for devotional prayer and contemplation"(p. 24).

For Mauck, quality art is seen as having the ability to transform a space, which then affects the spiritual experience of the people using the space. This point of view is also supported by Marilyn McKay, (1992) who talks about how art was also used to transform a space. In 1910, J.W. Beatty finished painting a group of murals in a kindergarten/assembly room in Rosedale Public School, Toronto. These murals were commissioned in response to the School Beautification Movement inspired by John Ruskin. This movement was a response to the belief that, "the physical surroundings of the classroom had a strong unconscious effect on the student"(p. 54). It was understood that the goal of this 'unconscious effect' was to create a stronger link between the student and God; "In Ruskin's scheme, children would look at images

of God's creations 'depicted in a realistic style without unnecessary ornament'"(p. 54). The Beautification Movement saw images of nature put in schools attended by children from all socio-economic classes in the hopes that these images would raise the '[Christian] moral standards' of the country. This movement became very active with over forty organizations installing art in classrooms throughout the U.S. and was very active in Canada from the 1880's to about 1915.

The assembly room was seen as a crucial location for art; "The assembly room is the place in the school where artistic and even lavish decoration [should be] the rule, for the assembly room has retained some of the religious atmosphere of those [churches of] bygone days"(p. 55). It was strongly believed that the atmosphere was more important for the child's "mental health and spiritual happiness" than anything they would get out of books (p. 56). The installation of nature images was an official activity in Ontario classrooms. Of all types of artworks, murals were considered to be especially effective, "art in the classroom, and in particular mural decoration, would cultivate not only the powers of observation of the eye, but also of the mind"(p. 57). Another educator's theories were also widely referred to at this time. Friedrich Froebel's theories "on the uplifting function of nature...were identical to those of Ruskin"(p. 58). Beatty's murals were "an effort on the part of the Ontario Department of Education to instill in the pupils of Rosedale Public School a Christian Morality by means of exposure to what the Department believed to be images of God's creations"(p. 59).



Images are not the only things necessary, however, in order to create a sacred space. Louis Bouyer (1967) talks about the importance of meaning in the material aspects of the place of worship. He begins by underlining the importance of the church building; “and here it is that the architecture comes in. For liturgy is nothing else, but the gathering together of mankind in the house of the Father”(p. 5). He feels however, that in many contemporary churches, the feeling has been lost with imprecise reproductions of the past: “what most of our churches reveal is not very inspiring. Most of the time they are still a routine reproduction of models of the past imperfectly or not at all understood. Copied from outside, they do not seem to have been made to embody a life springing up from inside the community they are to house.”(p. 6). He suggests that we must look to the original reasons why certain elements of the church were created, and from that point produce our contemporary worship spaces. In this manner, the spirit will reemerge: “Where is the spirit of men more apparent than in the homes that they build to house their lives? In the same manner, it is the way in which we shall build our churches...”(p. 6). One can learn from the past, by looking at periods of high creativity in Christian Liturgy. One must not, however, copy it materialistically, but understand the meaning behind those early churches that resulted in such moving creativity.

It must also be understood that the success of a church is “not [due to] a series of fixed details, all taken in isolation or together, which is important. It is rather a dynamic relation between some different focuses of the celebration, embodied in various elements and their coherent disposition”(p. 7-8). To demonstrate his point of view, he analyses various places of

worship, starting with early Synagogues. These Synagogues all contained The Ark, holding scrolls and other holy things, and which was protected by a veil. In front of The Ark was placed the Menorah. There was also the 'Seat of Moses', and the 'Bema', which was the place for reading the Torah (p. 16). All of these pieces were oriented toward Jerusalem, the direction in which all praying was done as well. Over time and location, the furniture has changed position, but has always remained significant in some way.

Bouyer goes on to describe other places of worship such as early Christian Churches and how they faced east toward the rising sun, as opposed to facing Jerusalem as the Synagogues do. The altars have been placed toward east as well and praying would happen in the same direction (p. 27-30). Different churches and religions attach significance to how they do things, how they place sacred objects and how they use them. The objects and orientation are significant to these religions, as well as to many others. Again, what's important is that we don't reproduce churches, objects and furniture blindly from designs of the past, without understanding their significance. Spirit must be included in the building of the house of worship along with the material structures. This inclusion can be accomplished by understanding and honouring the important views and beliefs of the given faith in designing and constructing a sacred space.

These articles are all relevant in some way to my research. However, they also present points which I challenge. For example, I do not subscribe to the belief that any one religion's beliefs should be adopted by a country, as believed by Ruskin and proponents of the school beautification movement. This blatant effort to 'Christianize' goes against everything I believe

about multiculturalism and freedom of religion. However, the form in which the beautification movement chose to pursue their goal of 'moral development' through art, is connected directly to this study.

Authors of all articles cited recognize the impact of art or architecture in transforming or creating a sacred space. Mauck also acknowledges the importance of atmosphere in impacting a child's 'mental and spiritual happiness'. What is not addressed in the first two articles (Mauck, McKay, 1996, 1992), is whether the art and murals actually succeeded in creating the spiritual experiences they were believed to produce. In the case of Rosedale Public School, we could question whether the murals achieved the goal of raising the Christian 'moral standard' of the students, and whether they were 'mentally and spiritually happier' as a result. In the last article (Bouyer, 1967), the importance of having a space in which to worship is addressed. This space should not simply include furniture and objects which are replications from the past, but should stem from the faith's belief system. That Churches are being constructed using replications of the past, can also be linked to Mauck's comment about churches housing mass-produced art objects, "expensive, often inferior...mass produced [art]..."(p. 23). Bouyer and Mauck comment on the importance of including aspects created specifically for the church. Feeling and creativity, along with an understanding and appreciation for the roots of the beliefs being honoured, must be used in creating a truly sacred space.

### Procedure/Research Method

Before the actual interviews, a pilot project was carried out, in which a 13 year-old boy and his mother were interviewed. This interview was done in a classroom in the church, as the chapel was not available. Pictures of the chapel were available for the informants to refer to and recreate a little of the experience of being in the chapel. This interview was very valuable in the preparation of the real research interviews.

In order to gain insight into the Chapel users' experience, the study consisted of open-ended interviews with two parent-child sets. These volunteer participants were found with the help of the head of Religious Education at the Unitarian Church of Montreal. Both parent-child groups consisted of a child of 8 years of age and the child's mother (it was not a requirement to have two mothers and no fathers, however this is how it turned out). All informants have been active and regular attendees at the church for at least two years. Furthermore, both mothers have either been, and/or are presently involved in the R.E. programme as teachers.

The interviews were about an hour and were tape-recorded. I met the interviewees in a classroom where we spent a few minutes breaking the ice and going briefly over what I was doing, how the research was to be used, signing the consent forms, etc. We then headed to the chapel, letting the child go first and choose the place to sit.

The interview was semi-structured; I had specific questions to ask (Appendix A), but also let them participate in structuring the discussion. I was interested as well in exploring whatever related issues arose during the interview. Some of the questions were inspired by Stan Horner's

Journey questions, although the goal was not entirely the same (Horner, 1988). Before initiating any journey questions, I wanted to see if this 'journey' happened spontaneously, on its own. Did the informants start talking in such a way as if they were part of the mural; as though they were directly interacting with the places and creatures on the walls? Literally, the mural surrounds the person. Is the person on that journey by the simple fact that they are surrounded in this way? I also had secondary questions, which I referred to when the discussions stalled, and when there was extra time available.

#### Nature of the Data and its Treatment

The data consisted of transcripts of audio-recorded interviews. The mural was also used as a constant reference for making sense of the information I wanted to examine. Comparisons were drawn between my observations and other authors' viewpoints about the impact or effect of artwork (such as murals) on people. I was especially interested in the children's reactions and opinions concerning the chapel; how they interpreted the mural or different parts of it; whether they saw it simply as a nice picture, or whether they became involved in it instead of remaining detached observers.

In reporting the results of the study, I will begin by giving a general overview of the respondents' reactions and then proceed to discuss the important points in more depth. In my discussion, I focus more on the children's reactions, referring to the parents only occasionally. To protect their privacy, the names of the informants have been changed. Gary and Marie are

the children. Gp and Mp are Gary and Marie's mothers, respectively. The interviewer is referred to as 'I' in dialogue quotes.

I had anticipated that the discussions would go on tangents. However, I found this did not happen. The interviews were much more straightforward: each question was answered directly, then the next question was addressed and so on.

There was a distinct difference between the two children in how they behaved and spoke. Gary was much more active and talkative, while, Marie was quite shy and, at times, reluctant to explain her responses with more than just one word.

The responses have been grouped according to whether the children's responses were similar or different from each other. It must be understood however, that due to the nature of the responses, there is not always a clear-cut distinction to be made.

### Overview

Both children and parents were very enthusiastic about the change that occurred with the instillation of the mural. It is a room they all enjoy now, and they feel it is special. The chapel did not turn out according to what they expected, and were all surprised by the result. The children, especially, thought it would stay plain, just change colour, and so were especially surprised. They both reported that they felt certain parts of the mural somehow connected to their own private lives. The mural is something, which extends to other parts of their worlds; it

is not simply a picture painted on a wall at their church. They would miss the mural were it to disappear, and would be angry against whoever was responsible for its disappearance.

The 'Honerian journey' that I had thought may have occurred spontaneously did not happen. Horner does not infer that this journey should happen suddenly in this way. However, I had wondered whether it would happen in this manner due to the fact that the children, literally surrounded by the mural, would already be, in a sense, 'in' the mural. When faced with the journey questions however, both children symbolically went into the mural, but had very different ways of interacting with it. Gary was much more adventurous and interactive with the characters and settings. Marie, on the other hand, played more the role of an observer.

The animals were the parts of the mural most referred to by the children, as oppose to the landscape. All respondents, including the parents, felt that the furniture, carpet and/or other objects had an impact on how well the room succeeds as a sacred place. For the most part, they felt that the room would not be as special or sacred without these other elements.

Another important point, which came up was that the mural does not seem to be having a direct impact on learning about Unitarianism or the Seven Principles. The informants did recognize, however, that the painting does reinforce some aspects of the faith.

The most significant thing for Gary, was that the room was no longer boring. He used the word 'boring' on many occasions to describe how the chapel used to be and how he had expected it to remain. For Marie, the theme of nature seemed to be the most meaningful aspect of the mural.

Aspects Where the children had similar responses

*Do you remember what the services were like before it was painted?; Do you remember how you felt during those services?* Although both attended services and remembered that they had attended them, neither Child had any firm recollection of the services before the mural was painted. Gary recalled, “it was only boring”(Bissett, 1999, p.1), he had no recollection, other than his feelings of boredom. This feeling was mirrored when asked what he had expected the chapel would be like when it was decorated and what he had thought would be in it. Gary remarked that he, “thought it was going to stay boring...it didn’t”. When asked if he’d known of the plans before the finished product, and whether he had been in the chapel during the painting process, he answered: “Ya, but you were painting it the boring colour”<sup>1</sup>. The word, ‘boring’ came up many times throughout the interview with Gary. His mother later said that this was an issue for her and her husband: they were constantly trying to create experiences for him, especially at church, which weren’t boring. In his mother’s opinion, the fact that he didn’t find it boring, was an important point: one that indicated that this was a special place for him.

For Marie, although the word ‘boring’ wasn’t used, she referred to the plainness of the room: “I thought it was going to be plain and one colour” (p. 10). Both children didn’t expect anything special in the redecoration of the room. They had no real expectations, other than it

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<sup>1</sup> Gary was present during the first phase of the mural when the blue base coat was being applied.



wouldn't be very different; it would stay plain and dull. When asked if they liked the room now, both were positive. Gary with an enthusiastic "Ya!" (p. 3) and Marie with a nod.

I then asked them, *What about [the chapel] makes it special for you?* This was the start of some interesting responses. Both children related in some way to something that had a meaning for them in their own private lives. Marie's immediate response was the bugs, because "I like bugs". I was then told that she collects bug paraphernalia. Insects are something which are special for her. She also said she liked the bears because they were cute, but the *most* special thing was the butterfly in the wheat field (p.12).

Gary's first response, after looking around for a while, was [pointing at the polar bears]: "they showed a copy of my mom's drawing." Before the mural, there had been a painting on the wall with polar bears, which his mother had painted. For Gary, it was meaningful that he saw his mother being honoured, in a sense, in the chapel. He also mentioned the "words all over" [referring to the Seven Principles] (p. 3), along with the bugs and even took the time to count how many there were of each type of insect. Late in the discussion, when asked if he could choose one thing in the chapel as the *most* important or special, he pointed to the bats in a high corner near the ceiling, "[because] nobody ever sees them except me" (p. 4). For Gary, the bats were important because it was something that was entirely his own; nobody else could see them. We all enjoy having things that are just our own. This was apparent with both children, who made parts of this public space their own; Marie with her bugs and Gary with the 'copy' of his mother's bears along with the bats.

I asked the children what was special to them several times in varying forms. This was done in order to confirm what they had said (Kvale, 1996). What was interesting here was that the answers changed somewhat as I re-asked the question. Gary started out with the bears, and although they remained important for him, the bats came up as the most special for him, even though he hadn't mentioned them at first. For Marie there was more consistency in her answers. She said from the start that the bugs were special for her and picked the butterfly as the most special. The butterfly, although not an insect in the same way as a fly or ant, is nonetheless a bug. I'm not sure if perhaps Gary was feeling pressure from being asked so many times a similar question, to come up with another answer. In anycase, there appear to be several aspects of the chapel, which appealed for various reasons to both of them. The fact that Gary changed his answers somewhat from time to time isn't necessarily indicative of invalid responses, but rather, that the mural is something which has a dynamic which allows for new things to be noticed and related to. Like any highly detailed work, there is always something being seen for the first time, or being noticed again. There may simply be several different possible answers to the question about what's special to someone about the room.

Clearly, the children like this space. It was therefore not surprising that both children would be upset if the mural were to suddenly disappear. Both children had emotional responses. Gary responded with a strong: "I'd sue 'em" [referring to whoever took the mural] (Bissett, p. 7), and Marie with, "mad" (p. 19). When asked what she would miss, Marie said that she would

miss the sunset. Gary didn't specify any one thing in particular, other than he would feel, "bad, very bad" (p. 7). It is possible they may have been responding, in part, to the criminal aspect of someone taking something that they shouldn't have, as oppose to the absence of the thing itself. However, even if this were the case, if they didn't care about the mural, there wouldn't have been as quick a response of anger and, for Gary, the idea of suing whoever took it.

Their responses also show, that perhaps as a society, we are teaching children to want to get retribution; to get even with anyone who does them wrong. I'm not convinced that this is a positive message, as this is where, in my opinion, much of the violence we see among children and youths today is stemming from. In this age of Star Wars, and Cops and Robbers type shows, we don't have to look far to see where they are picking up this message. The influence of television is the likely source of many of these ideas.

Communication was another very important aspect to consider in how the mural acts to create a sacred space. What message about the Unitarian faith did viewers receive from the mural? So, the following question was posed: "*Have you learned anything about Unitarianism or about being Unitarian from being in here?*" Gary was getting a little tired and restless by this point and answered, "Well, sort of. I know Unitarians are very good drawers now. Except for my dad" (p. 8). Gary's sense of humour was present throughout the interview and he often had quick, witty remarks. Marie first responded that she hadn't learned anything about Unitarianism from the mural. However, we followed up with some other related questions, and she had more to say;

I: Do you have a special meaning for yourself of what being Unitarian is?

M: To be nice to the animals.

I: Anything else?

M: No

I: So, That's kind of like the web of life, to be nice to every animal.

Mp: Do you know the web of life?

M: Ya, for everything to be treated fairly.

I: So does this mural represent something about the Unitarian religion or faith?

M: Circle of life.

I: Can you talk to me a bit about what that means to you?

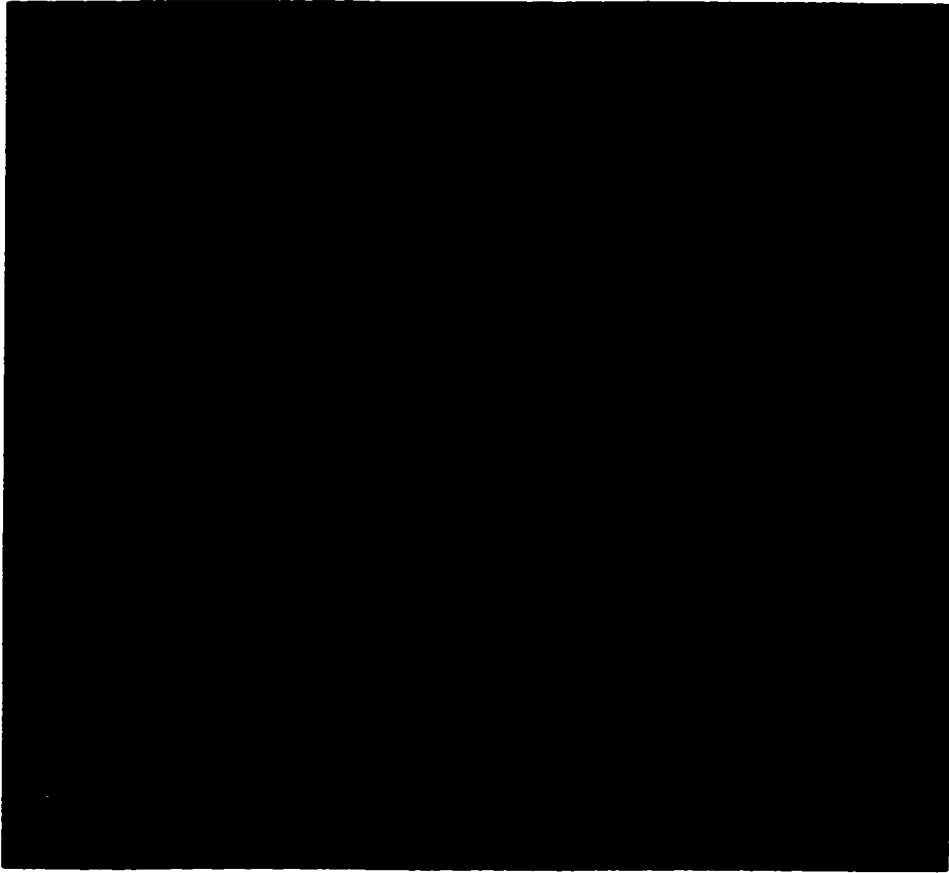
M: That there's [tape unrecognizable] animals in different parts of the world. (p. 15-16)

I realize that this exchange was a bit of leading. Steinar Kvale (1996) writes that leading questions can be an effective mode of questioning, especially in qualitative research interviews (p. 158). "The task is...not to avoid leading research questions, but to recognize the primacy of the question and attempt to make the orienting questions explicit, thereby providing the reader with the possibility of evaluating their influence on the research findings and of assessing the validity of the findings"(p.159). Marie didn't come up with the term 'web of life' on her own, although she didn't need any explanation. However, she did come up with her own expression "the circle of life". She is obviously concerned with animals and their place in the world.

Through animals, she can relate to the concepts of living peacefully with one another; that we are all on this earth together. These are messages the Unitarian faith occupies itself with and tries to live by (UCM,1999). Marie has found an aspect of the chapel, which she relates to and identifies with. Her answers may not have addressed the original question about what was learned from the mural directly, however they did touch on how the mural reflects and supports the values of the Unitarian faith.

Both parents also commented on the importance of nature and the environment. Marie's mother continued along her daughter's train of thought, "What [Marie] said about being connected to all parts of the environment, whether or not we're presently in that part of the Earth at the time" (Bissett, p. 16). The Unitarian Church is very concerned with the environment: 'The Web of Life'.

This point concerning the environment was also referred to by Gary's mother, "I think [the mural is] reinforcing of the ecological notions. I think that that's important. It seems to be an important theme in this church....and as I said, I really like the fact that it's based on the native notion of directionality" (p. 8). To have people learn about the faith directly from the mural is not necessarily the only goal. The objective is also to provide a space in which people can have special or sacred experiences, which affirm their faith. Although Gary didn't respond directly to this question in a serious manner, his interest in nature came up at different times and in different ways throughout the interview. He commented at the beginning of the interview about how he thought there should be a larger variety of trees in the forest and was also knowledgeable about the names of trees, animals and bugs. He even corrected me at times on the proper names for things, "No, that's a 'Shab Fly'" (p. 2) (Figure 3). The Unitarian Church's beliefs regarding the environment are represented through the mural's focus on nature. This has clearly had an effect on both children. However, it is apparent that the mural is more a reinforcement of these beliefs, than a vehicle for teaching these beliefs.



**Figure 3. Shab Fly**

The fact that the mural does not teach directly about Unitarian beliefs became even clearer when we talked about the seven principles (Appendix B) written on the walls. When asked, *Do you think you've learned anything about the 7 principles from the writing on the walls?*, Gary's immediate response was that he hadn't learned anything about the seven principles from the written principles on the walls. This coincides with his forgetting what they were at first. Interestingly, the words were something he indicated as something he liked about the chapel, "and they got all these words all over...words, words, words" (p. 3)(Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6). Later, when reminded, Gary remembered that he had been told what they were, but had forgotten. He didn't remember anything specific about them though, only that they'd been pointed out (p. 7). The principles do not appear to have made a significant impact on him.

Marie's response was that she did feel she had learned something from them, but she was hesitant to explain;

I: Do you want to talk to me about what you've learned?

M: No

I: Could you just give me maybe one example of something you've learned?

M: That they all mean something....

I: Do you remember if the 7 principles have been pointed out in services?

M: Once I came down here with my class and...we were doing the whole thing about the seven principles. And then we came in here and said exactly [what] each one means.

I: Do you remember anything specifically from that day?

M: No. (p. 15-16)

Although she remembered distinctly learning about the principles from the mural, Marie didn't remember the specifics of the principles themselves. For these children then, without

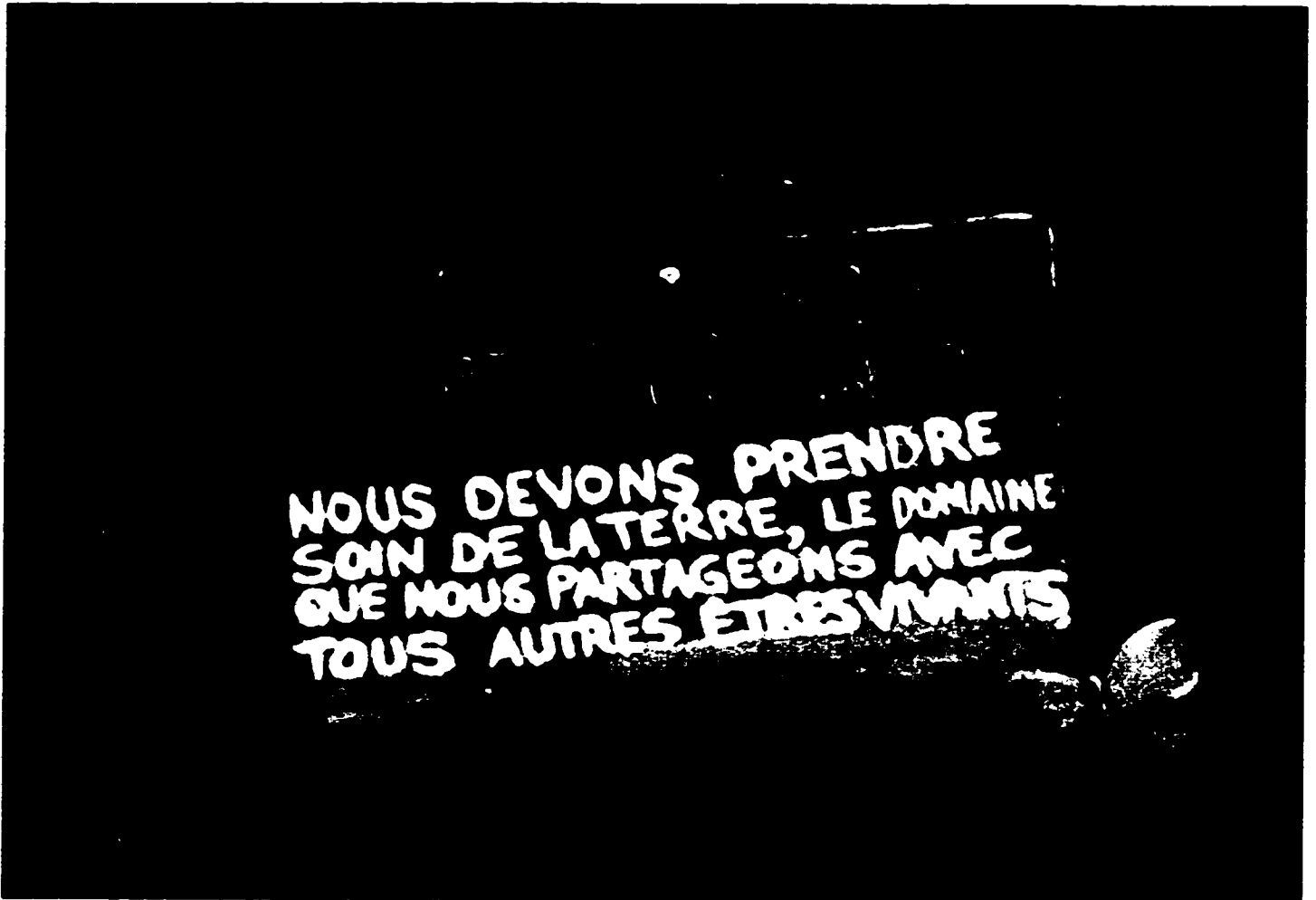
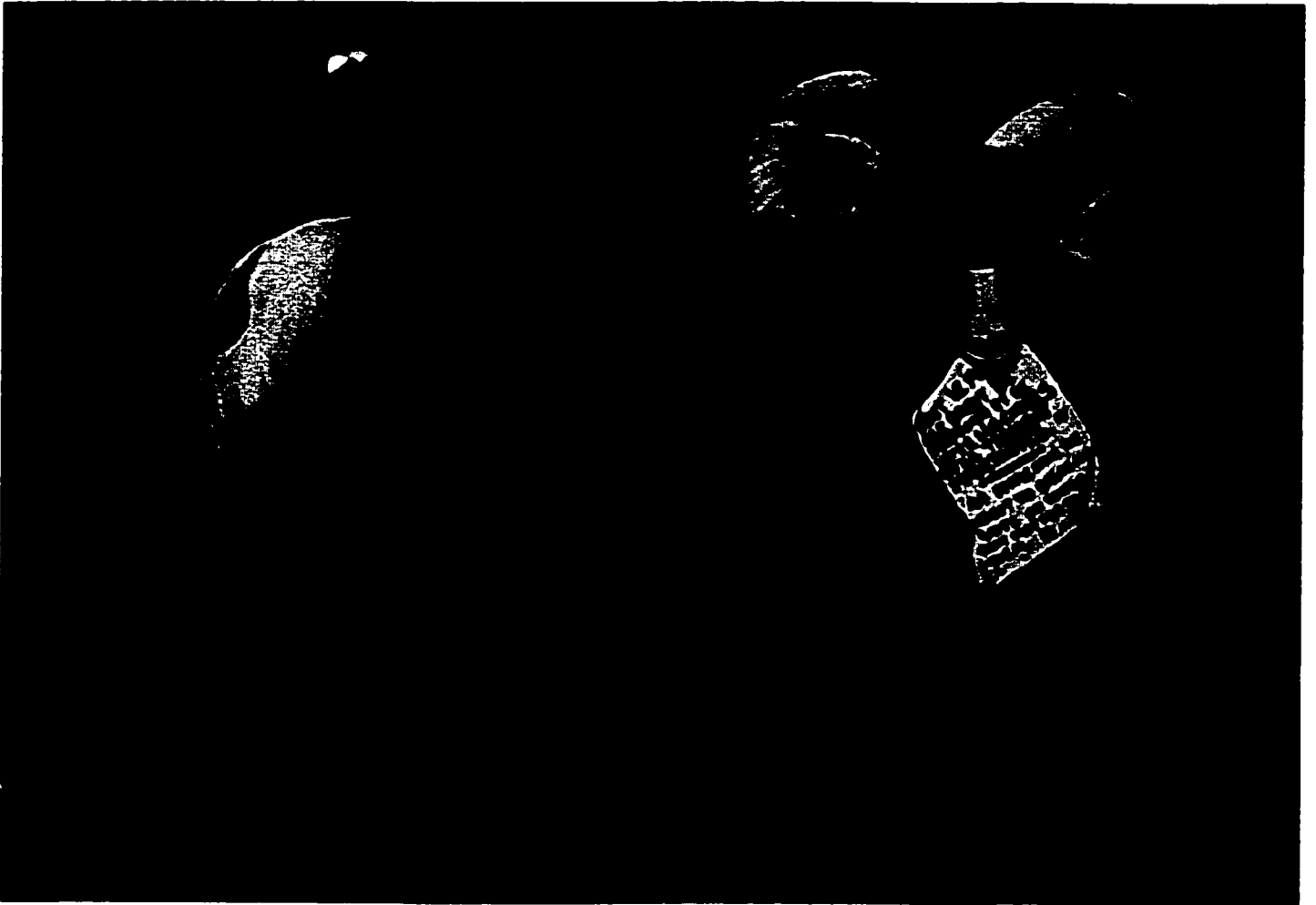


Figure 4. Squirrel Principle





**Figure 5. Balloon Principle**



**Figure 6. Ram Principle (“Head-Butting Thing”)**

consciously being made aware of the principles, it would appear that they don't learn from them. And even with adult intervention in using the mural to teach, the information doesn't seem to have been retained.

The parents had different experiences of the written principles. Marie's mother said, "It's nice to see them written there and sit down there and go over them from time to time"(p.16). However, she also stated that she hasn't actually used them in teaching her class about the principles:

I've done it myself sitting in front of [the principle], but we've never actually used them as a tool. Probably a good idea to do that with a class, because I'm not sure how much the kids do notice them...adults will stop and read things, but kids won't necessarily stop and do that. And I know, I think it was pointed out in the 1<sup>st</sup> service....I don't think that I did guide the kids around the room. (p. 16)

Mp had taken some time to look at the principles herself, but didn't think she'd ever used them to teach. Gp, on the other hand, didn't think she'd, "ever actually gone around and read them" (p. 8). Both of these parents seem to like the fact that the principles were painted on the walls, but only one consciously had used them to learn from, while neither used them to teach with.

To summarize about the principles, Marie knew right away that the words were the seven principles, but couldn't remember what the principles were specifically. Neither child could remember any details about the principles. The seven principles were incorporated into the mural in a way that was meant to make them more accessible and to encourage the children to be present to them and learn from them. Unfortunately, this effect does not appear to be happening.

For both the children and parents, not much seems to have been learned on this level. The principles, on their own, don't look like they have had much impact. It is with conscious use of them as a teaching tool that they will be of use in the learning or appreciating of the seven principles.

Another area of questioning in which there was agreement between the children was about what the chapel would be like without the carpet and benches. I was hoping to get an indication in order to separate the importance of the mural alone, from the mural combined with all the other aspects of the room, in creating a sacred space. Gary didn't remember ever being in the room without the carpet and furniture. However when asked, *Do you have any idea of what it might be like in here without the carpet, can you imagine that?*, he responded, "You'd have to erase all that grass [pointing to a section of the mural with grass] it wouldn't be nice...it wouldn't!" (p. 5). This was an interesting response, showing a certain aesthetic ability in how the colour of the carpet works together with the grass painted on the walls (Figure 6). When Marie was asked, she said she had in fact been in the room without the carpet and benches, and that, "it isn't as special...cause it doesn't look like there's any grass in the room" (p. 12). Without the carpet, she felt the chapel was missing something. For both children, the carpet's



Figure 7. Duck Comer (“You’d have to erase all that grass.”)

allusion to grass was a very significant part of the chapel. It is a way to tie the room together and successfully complete the illusion of being outdoors and in nature.

Both parents had seen the chapel without furniture. However, they did not feel entirely the same about the effect of this absence. Marie's mother felt that the carpet holds the room together, without which, the room isn't as special, "it's the difference between making the room a chapel and just a room with pictures on the wall" (p. 12). She felt this way not only about the carpet, but also about the other objects which make the room a whole, "it wouldn't have everything here, the altar, the font, it makes it more of a chapel like" (p. 12). These objects are not simply 'things' merely used to decorate the space. They are sacred objects or pieces of furniture which hold meaning for the people who use the chapel. This is a point raised in Bouyer's comments concerning the meaningful objects used in the creation of a sacred space. The objects, however, must have meaning behind them to be truly effective in creating the space. In the chapel, the use of specially created pieces of furniture (the altar) along with older pieces brought in from elsewhere (the font), for Mp, adds to the 'chapel' feeling of the room.

Gary's mother, on the other hand, felt the room could still be successful as a special space without the furniture. She had been involved in a Pagan ceremony one evening, when the carpet was still down, but the benches were put away. For her, it was the lighting which made a more significant difference, "by candle light...it was VERY successful for that type of thing. Although the carpet I think was down for that, but the benches were out. So, I mean we danced, and it was lots of fun. And people seemed to really enjoy the space...it was very successful".

She went on to say that although she hadn't been a part of anything which took place in the chapel without the carpet, she had looked in and seen it without, and felt it still worked, "I think it works quite well really. The carpet adds to that feeling of grass for sure, but I don't think it loses a whole bunch without it" (p. 4). Overall, these people felt the room would not be complete or as special without the other elements, especially the carpet. Gp was the only one who felt the chapel would still work well as a sacred space without the carpet. Yet, even she admitted it would lose a little. So, without these adjuncts, the mural would not function as well to create a sacred space. These aspects of the chapel are, in a sense, partners, along with the mural, in creating the sense of sacredness of the chapel.

#### Aspects Where the children differed in their responses

Although the children responded in a similar vein in several parts of the interview, they had completely different ways of responding in others. When asked, *The first time you came into the chapel once it was done, and you saw it with the mural, what did you think?* Gary had a very unanticipated response. He began by expressing all the things he didn't like about the chapel, "They put too many ducks here and they put too many mountains there and too many trees over there....It's all pine trees (Figure 8). Why is it all pine trees? They should have put some other kinds of trees". I asked him if that was what he expected. He repeated his answer from earlier that he "expected it to still be boring...all blue" (p. 2). Gary was very consistent in what he said he'd expected the chapel would be like, repeating several times how he thought it would remain



Figure 8. Forest



boring. When asked how he found it now he first responded, “[I] didn’t know what it was at first. I thought...that’s the orange place, that’s the green place, that’s the blue place, that’s the light blue place, that’s the sort of green place.” To which his mother said, “so, I take it it’s not boring anymore.” Gary answered this by saying it wasn’t boring at all anymore, “before it was, cause it was all blue. Who’d want to come into a chapel that was all blue?” (p. 2). I found Gary’s straight-forwardness and freedom to say what was on his mind refreshing and, on occasion, humorous. His response about not knowing what the mural was at first was interesting. It is possible he was being a little facetious. Did he really not recognize what the mural was? It’s also possible that he meant that he didn’t know that the landscapes represented the Six Directions.

Marie’s answer was quite simple: she thought, ‘it was really great’. She specifically mentioned that she liked that there were animals from a variety of places, and that they were all in the different environments they belonged in,

I: Oh I see, so you wouldn’t find a polar bear in a wheat field, that kind of thing?

M: [Ya]. (p. 11)

Nature was a recurring theme for Marie, in terms of what she was drawn to about the mural. Later in the interview, she mentioned again that she appreciated the fact that there were different animals in different environments. She felt that this was an important point to remember: the world is inter-connected and different places work with each other so that, even though we may

not have certain animals in our immediate environment, they are still important in the overall scheme of things.

The nature theme came up again in response to the question: *What does the mural make you think of? Do you ever have any memories that come back for you?* For Marie, it was nature that the mural made her think of. She went on to say that it was the animals most specifically that made her think of nature (p. 13). Gary, on the other hand, didn't have anything to say on this subject, other than to repeat, "I just remember this place used to be REALLY boring!" (p. 5).

The mural did remind both mothers of places and events. Marie's mother said she was reminded of places they'd visited, but that she didn't have a memory of one place in particular, "no, it's not like we have a cottage or one specific place you know, we've gone to different places every time we go away"(p. 13). Gary's mother, on the other hand, was reminded of very specific places and times in her life:

Gp: I think different parts remind you of different things. I lived 10 years in the prairies so you know, I often have memories of that...the wheat. My parents cottage has tons of loons in it

G: you think of the cottage?

Gp: Ya, and other places like...the sunset wall reminds me of the country in northern Quebec where I went to camp when I was a kid...the YWCA camp. (p. 6)

She had specific memories of places and, because of that, was reminded of certain events. It was also interesting to listen to her talk about her memories, and to witness her son being able to hear and share in the memories about his grandparents' cottage.

One of the most noticeable and intriguing differences in the children's comments came in response to the journey question, *If I could snap my fingers and you could walk into the mural from here, where would you go?* Both children had the same entrance point into the wheat field, (Figure 9), but from there the similarities end. Gary's 'trip' was much more active and interactive with the characters in the mural, while Marie's trip was much calmer as she played more the role of observer;

I: You walk into the wheat, what happens?

M: I see a lot of bugs.

I: And you keep walking, what do you come to?

M: Corn

I: And then what?

M: Then I see seagulls eating it...I mean black birds

I: Once you get there, do you want to keep going somewhere else, is there anything else you want to see?

M: No. (p. 13-14)

Marie went into the mural and observed the field and birds. Her 'presence' in the mural did not affect the actions of the birds or corn. The birds, in turn, did not affect her actions either. She didn't express any feelings or emotional responses to her surroundings in the mural. This may have been partly my fault. The last question I asked was closed, instead of open as I had intended, and allowed for a yes/no response. I have mentioned earlier that Marie was quiet and brief in her answers to questions, and that it was difficult to get her to expound on her answers. I may have had more success had I not asked a yes/no question, which gave her the opportunity to end her journey.



Figure 9. Wheat Field

Gary's journey was much more adventurous. He went into the mural and interacted with the characters and environments he encountered. He entered at the same place as Marie, through the wheat field. From there, the adventure began. He said he'd try and go over to the cliff and to the water (Figure 7), "then I'd try and swim over there and try and walk over there, then I'd try and go the whole mural" (p. 5). I continued to question him about his journey:

I: And what do you think you'd see?

G: Fox...and then I'd run into those guys

I: The prairie dogs..

I: Ya,

I: What happens to you [when] you walk up to the prairie dogs?

GP: Do you talk to them?

G: No! I ignore them. They're staring at me and I get mad at them. Then I walk over to the ducks...they'd fly away cause they'd be scared [laughing a bit]! Then I'd swim, and I'd be scared of the polar bear!

I: Is the polar bear doing anything?

G: Yeah, looking down to the stairs.

I: So, how would you stay away from him?

G: Glop on my face and act like a zombie...

I: Then what do you do?

G: To the mountain, get past the head-butting thing (Figure 6) and then go see the cute squirrel and make sure it doesn't bite me. (Figure 4)

I: What does the squirrel do when you get there?

G: Runs up a tree. Can I stop now? (p. 5-6)

Gary was very animated as he talked about his adventure. It is also evident that he didn't completely 'go into' the mural, as some of his dialogue referred back to the room itself, "[the polar bears are] looking down the stairs" (p. 5) (Figure 10). He saw the bears, who face the stairs as being able to see the actual chapel room itself, and not like they were in their own world. The



Figure 10. Polar Bears looking down stairs

bears were in a world, which was very concretely attached to ours and which they were aware of. This lack of distinction between the mural and the room itself could also be indicative of the successful integration of the mural with the physical architecture of the room. Another point about Gary is, as with other areas of the interview, he was very up front with his feelings about the interview itself. When he no longer wanted to talk about the subject, he simply asked if he could stop.

There was a very obvious difference throughout the interview in the energy level of the children. This discrepancy was made especially clear in how they each responded to the journey question. The difference in energy level may have been due to the fact that Marie was interviewed on a weekday evening as oppose to Gary's interview, which was on a Sunday early afternoon. Marie may have been tired and low energy after a full day in school, while Gary was full of energy on his day off. This difference may also have been due to gender behavioral differences. These two very different approaches to answering the journey question demonstrate the difference other researchers have found between boys and girls. Boys tend to be more active and rambunctious, while girls tend to be quieter and less assertive (Gleitman, 1991). Whether as a result of genetics or socialization or a combination of both, boys and girls have been found to differ in behavior. This was certainly the case in this instance. However, it must not be forgotten that these results can also be due in part individual differences. Beyond the difference in time of day or gender, they are two distinct individuals with distinct ways of being. I feel that

this is the most important factor to be aware of when trying to explain the differences between Gary and Marie.

Again, different answers were provided to the question: *Do you ever come in here on your own, with friends or with your family?* Gary has never come in on his own, nor is it something he thinks he would like to do (p. 7). Marie, on the other hand, has come in on her own as well as with friends. When her mother has to stay for meetings, Marie goes into the chapel to “see stuff.” On her own, she “just come[s] in and...look[s] around.” She said she likes being in there by herself and said it is different than in the services, “because it’s quiet.” With other children she says she talks and plays and that is not so different from when she’s in there with everyone else (p. 14). The chapel is a room she enjoys being in when she’s at the church.

This next question, *Have you ever talked to any of your friends about the mural?*, brought up a very interesting response from Gary. His feeling was that, because his friends were of different religious backgrounds, he didn’t tell them about the chapel; “No, because all my friends are Catholic....I don’t know if my French friends are Catholic or not. I just know my school friends are Catholic” (p. 8). This was a very unexpected response, especially considering the nature of the Unitarian faith. One of the major beliefs is the acceptance and welcoming of people of all backgrounds; religious, ethnic, sexual orientation, etc. What was the basis for this response? I doubt it was because he thinks his friends *shouldn’t* be interested, but more likely that they *wouldn’t* be interested because they have a different religion. This would also lead me



to conclude that the chapel for Gary is, in fact, an integral part of the teachings of his church and faith, and not simply an interestingly painted room. It is a sacred *Unitarian* chapel, distinct from the chapels of any other religion. Marie said she had told people about the chapel, but didn't expand on that at all.

Unlike their children, the parents both said they had talked quite a bit to others about the chapel. Marie's mother's reaction was, "Ya! I've talked to a lot of people about it....they hadn't heard of anything like it before. Envious I guess, that we had this special [chapel/place] here for the children...[usually the children's space is] in church basements, the worst part of the church" (p. 18). Gary's mother had also talked enthusiastically to others about the chapel, "I try and describe it as a mural that goes all the way around the room and focuses on different landscapes, different Canadian landscapes, and the south, east, west....particularly when I'm talking to people who are creative themselves. They're really fascinated by the notion of the way of creating a sacredness, and I think that's the most interesting part of it." Another point she felt strongly about was that the chapel wasn't too cute: "It isn't cute, so it doesn't play to the Disney-esque...that it could easily [have done]". She also felt that it is a room which is able to reach, "across levels of age groups, [and] bridges the gap from small children to [older children]" (p. 9). She went on to say that she notices different details whenever she comes into the chapel. Sometimes she sees new elements she hadn't noticed before, while other times she notices something all over again (p. 18).

## Discussion

By interviewing these children, a few aspects of the mural's role in transforming the space became clearer. There were differences and similarities in regard to which aspects of the mural and room had the most impact on the children. For Gary, one of the main roles of the mural was that it made the room more interesting and no longer boring. For Marie, especially, the nature represented in the mural made it special. Gary also related to this representation of nature. This occurred especially during his "imaginary journey" into the mural, when he swam across lakes and oceans, climbed mountains, and encountered animals.

The Beautification movement put images of nature in schools because they believed it would raise "[Christian] moral standards...[and] would create a stronger link between students and God"(Mckay, 1992). This goal of linking children with a Christian God is not the aim of the Unitarian church. However, the importance of nature and its power to create a certain sacred quality in a place, is agreed upon. "Images of nature" make up the entire theme of this chapel. This nature certainly seems to have succeeded in creating the desired effect of sacredness. In the cases of these two children, nature has played a significant role in this chapel becoming a special and sacred place.

For both child informants, an important aspect was that the chapel presented details they could relate to their own lives and make their own. To refer to Mauck again, artists such as Michelangelo and Bernini, "[knew] full well that people are most touched when they [are] drawn into the holy by an appeal to their own human experience" (Mauck, 1996). Being 'drawn into

the holy' isn't the role of the children's chapel per se. However what is holy to someone of one religion can be equated to what is sacred or special to someone else. That the mural has aspects, which appeal to the children on a personal level, appears to have a significant role in transforming the space into something sacred or special for them. For Gary, identifying a component of the mural, which he sees as inspired by his mother's art work (the bears), allows him to make a connection with his own 'human experience'. Furthermore, the bats, which only he can see, were a second aspect that "personalized" the space for him. As mentioned earlier, Marie related on a personal level to the representation of nature in the mural. More specifically, the bugs were something she related well to. Another thing, which personalized the space for her, was her involvement in the painting of it. Although it was only for a few hours one day--she helped paint part of the base coat--she is proud of the sections of the mural that she helped produce. In this case, the 'human experience' was in the actual making of the mural, as oppose to relating the mural solely to an aspect of her experience outside the chapel. The personalized quality of a space isn't necessarily the concrete elements of that space then, but could also be the involvement and sense of accomplishment one feels in having helped create that space.

As significant as the mural was on its own, without the carpet, the children felt the room was less special. The mural works in conjunction with other elements to transform the space. The carpet seemed to unify the space by making a physical and symbolic connection between the mural on all four walls. As with a framed painting, the mural is much more successful when combined with the other components of the room, especially the carpet. The carpet, along with

the benches and other objects are, in a sense, 'framing' the mural. Furthermore, the carpet likely adds to the comfort of the space with its colour, texture and warmth. Framing a space aesthetically however, is not the only goal of the components of the chapel. As Bouyer pointed out, it is the dynamic between these components, which embody different focuses of the celebration that is significant (p. 7-8). In the context of the chapel, various focuses are indeed encompassed by the objects. For the most part, nature is the prominent focus of the chapel. The carpet represents grass and the benches were designed to have an organic feel to them in order to carry the feeling of nature. The altar was built using sticks salvaged from the 1998 ice storm, which were left in close-to-natural-state (Figure 1). The font is the only major object, which does not directly represent nature. It is used for a very meaningful part of the worship to celebrate the joys and concerns of the children. Also, it was an object that survived the fire, which destroyed the old church building, and so holds other historical and emotional value for participants. None of these objects were made or included without deliberate thought to the meaning behind them and what they represented. Contrary to Bouyer's concern about modern churches, no "routine reproductions of models of the past" (p. 6) were used here. The result is a space, which is considered special or sacred by those who use it.

Another important point uncovered through talking with the children, was that although the mural seems to have played a significant role in the chapel's acquisition of an overall sacred quality, it does not appear to teach anything directly. The mural is very successful in reflecting and supporting some of the values of the Unitarian faith, however the children in this case study

have not learned specific points about Unitarianism or the seven principles from it. Museums also deal with similar issues about educating their visitors. In some respects a museum can be compared to the sacredness of the chapel. Barbara Newsom and Adele Silver(1978) indicate that some museum workers feel that, “an aesthetic experience...is a form of spiritual experience”(p. 32).

Also similar to the chapel is the goal of the museum to educate. One of the objectives of the Museum educator is to have the viewer, adult or child, look at a piece of art with purpose (Chapman, 1978). Whether it be to search out themes, objects, colours, feelings, and so on, the educator plays a prominent role in having the viewer experience the piece in a way they may not have without this intervention. Museums for the most part, don't simply hang a painting or place a sculpture and leave viewers entirely on their own. Museums have education departments, who's purpose is to intervene and educate museum goers. Education in museums is of such importance that some museums had their educational programmes in place before actually building the museum and acquiring their collections (Newsom & Silver 1978). Like the museum, if the chapel is to have an effective educative quality, then a proactive approach must be adopted.

This is not to say that without intervention the chapel, or a museum, would not have an impact on the viewer. “At least some segments of the public seem to understand that art museums, do an important part of their educational job simply by staying open and exhibiting their holdings in ways that visitors can understand. But there is, of course, a great deal more that

the museum can do”(Newsom and Silver, 1978, p. 32). Like the museum, the chapel is capable of standing on its own and creating a meaningful experience for those who enter it. Nonetheless, conscious intervention has an important impact on furthering the experience and especially the learning, which happens there. Parents and teachers must assume a more active role in using the mural as a pedagogical tool, if the principles represented therein are to have an impact. As a ‘backdrop’, however, the mural is very effective on its own in creating an overall atmosphere of sacredness.

### Implications

The Beautification movement felt that “the physical surroundings of the classroom [have] a strong unconscious effect on the student”(Mckay, 1992). Churches, schools, museums, community centres, as well as private citizens can use this approach in creating spaces conducive to their particular needs. Although this study cannot be generalized to other populations, some of the points about the children’s reaction to the chapel mural could serve as a starting point in developing a plan to create other special spaces for children. For example, incorporating features, which assist users in making connections between the space and their own personal lived experience, is something worth considering. As with Marie, involving the children in the making of the space creates pride and a strong sense of connection with the space.

Painting a mural is a great place to start in creating a special space for children.

However, one must not forget the other elements of a space. The children and adults in this study did not see the chapel mural as complete without the carpet: all the elements work

together. A room with a mural or art hung on the walls will not be nearly as effective if it is missing carpeting or other flooring which works along with the walls to provide a finished look. Along the same lines, seating and other important objects need to work in conjunction with the walls and floor as well. It may help to think of it as an art piece that needs to be well presented and nicely framed. Likewise, in a chapel, sacred furnishings such as altars, baptismal fonts, and pews, aside from their functional roles, carry symbolic meanings, which contribute to the creation of the sacredness of a space. In this sense, these objects function more like works of art than like simple pieces of furniture. These objects play an important role that should not be overlooked.

If murals and other physical surroundings are expected to provide a learning experience, elders, organizers, or leaders should be ready to make deliberate use of these murals or surroundings in their teaching. They must not expect that users will learn on their own. As with the mural in this study, the children did not seem to be learning the Seven Principles by themselves. Intervention is needed to ensure that this learning takes place.

### Conclusion

I strongly suspect that I will be involved in some capacity in murals and decorative painting for the rest of my life. I've painted many murals, but I had never taken a step back to seriously look at how my paintings had changed a room and affected the people using that space. I've read and heard how different colours affect the atmosphere of a room and how murals in a

run-down neighbourhood help to revitalize and instill pride in the people living there. However, I'd never had the opportunity to study the impact of my own work on others. This thesis was a fascinating undertaking for me as an artist. It was a type of reflection: a chance to take stock of what I'm doing and how I'm doing it. I had to change my usual perspective, that of an artist, and take a look at what's been done from a new perspective, that of an art educator. It has been a worthwhile and interesting journey.



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**Appendix A****Background information in assessing candidacy of sets:****Child**

Language:

Age:

Sex:

How long at the church:

Regular attendee?:

Attended first chapel service?:

At services before renovations?:

**Parent**

Language:

Sex:

How long at Church:

Regular attendee?:

Attended first chapel service?:

At services before renovations?:

Involved in R.E.?:

Involved in renovation decisions or process?:

## Interview Questions

### Children and Parents Together

- Do you remember the room before it was redecorated?
- What were the services like?
- How did you feel in here during the services?
- What did you think the chapel would be like?
- What did you think the first time you saw the chapel with the mural?
- What about the room makes it special for you?
- Do you like this room?
- What is the most important or special part of this chapel for you?
- Have you been in the chapel when the benches and carpet are away?
- How would (do) you feel in the room without carpet, benches, etc?
- What difference does it make to the room?
- Do you still like it?
- Do you still like being in the chapel?
- What are your favorite parts of the mural? (why?)
- What does the mural make you think of?
- Does the mural bring back any memories? Can you tell me about them?
- If you could go into the mural, where would you go?
- What would you do?
- Does the chapel change each time you enter it? How?
- Do you like/become attached to the mural more after using room many times?
- What does the mural mean to you?
- What have you learned anything about the seven principles from the mural?
- Have you learned anything else about being a Unitarian from the mural?
- How does the mural represent the Unitarian faith to you?
- Does it fulfill what you feel a children's chapel should be?
- Do you have anything you want to say or to add?

### Children

- Do you like being here on your own? With friends, etc.?
- How do you feel in the room during these alone times?

### Adults

- Has your child ever spoken to you about the chapel and specifically the mural? What have they said?

Optional Questions:

- When you talk to other people about the chapel and the mural, what do you say?
- Have you come in alone together (or with other family members)
- What feelings and/or moods come to mind when you're in this room?
- What don't you like about the mural? Why?

## **Appendix B**

### **The 7 Principles:**

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

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

### **The 7 Principles in Children's language:**

1. Every person is important and valuable
2. All people should be treated fairly
3. Our churches are places where we should accept one another and learn together
4. Each person should be free to search for what is true and right
5. All people have the right to speak and vote in things that matter to them
6. We should help build a peaceful, fair, and free world
7. We need to take care of the earth, the home we share with all living things