



Northampton Unitarian News

Number 3, January to March 2004

May you all have a happy and peaceful Christmas, and enter 2004 refreshed and ready to play your part in the year to come.

Please send any contributions to me, Sue Woolley, via our e-mail contact form. Or see me in church!



SERVICE TAKERS FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2004

We meet on 2nd and 4th Sundays, at 10.30 a.m. Except where indicated, service takers are members of the congregation.

11 January	Mark Beaumont
25 January	Frank Field
8 February	Penny Collins
22 February	Fiona Boyle
14 March	Austin Fitzpatrick (GA President)
28 March	Jon Small

All are very welcome!

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

At this time of the year we often focus on the nearness of Christmas Day to the actual physical event of the Winter Solstice, and how, after 21st December, the days start to get longer again.

However this time of the year is also when another important, but far from as well known, astronomical event occurs: perihelion, which is when the earth makes its closest approach to the Sun. If we describe New Year as the “turning of the year”, then perihelion is just that.

Somehow, because of our slightly elliptical orbit, and thanks to Kepler’s Laws, the approach to perihelion happens to be when the earth is moving at its greatest velocity, in fact it is accelerating up until the big day itself, 4th January.

For some reason, I love the analogy between the hectic pace of life around Christmas and the New Year, and the fact that the earth itself is moving at its fastest. Big effort, and then? Relax! We can all slow down again. The bit I never get though is, if we are at our nearest to the Sun, why is it the coldest time of the year? Brrrrr..... !!

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from myself and the Committee. Enjoy!

Lots of Love, **Fiona XXXX**

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

When reflecting on the Unitarian services I have attended; one common theme has emerged. That something of the spirit of God or the Great Creator has been conveyed through the individuality of each person who has taken that service. Each service has been a unique “Jewel in The Crown,” offering a glimpse of the light of spiritual understanding which has the potential to flow through us all.

The service given by Tom Marriott, the MU President, offered a refreshing spiritual perspective. Tom spoke with perceptiveness on the subject of Belief in God. His theme was sprinkled with humorous stories and a little “theatre” for the benefit of Becky (Sue’s daughter) and the “Grown Up Children” present!

His physical demonstration of the spectrum of belief in God, ranging from an Atheist, through the shades in-between, to a committed Believer was enlightening. I understood from this, that each position on

the belief spectrum offers some unique advantages. If we are atheists, then well at least, we are not harbouring harmful concepts of God. Furthermore, some atheists possess a strong humanitarian / ecological compassion which exists independently of the idea of any “reward from God”, whether in this life or the next. If like so many we find ourselves wavering between belief and doubt, we can console ourselves with the fact that doubt is very human. Doubt can be a sign of a search for truth and spiritual integrity which in time can lead to a mature faith. Yet, if we are one of those lucky souls whose lives are immersed in a mystical relationship with God; then our lives can act as a luminous inspiration, which draws others to God. This inspiration may well continue after our physical death. Of course, our beliefs are not carved in stone. We may progress from atheism to a deep faith in the course of a lifetime. Sadly, we may also lose our faith, or question our former beliefs.

Tom reminded us of the need for mutual tolerance when discussing our experiences, synchronicities and dreams of “God.” We interpret our various experiences in very different ways. A Unitarian hymn underlines this point, “Some people call it nature, others call it God.” (Incidentally where else but a Unitarian meeting could you confide that you’d meant to go shopping but had been guided through a dream to come to the service!) Too much intellectual analysis and dissent, when discussing “God “ may dissect into thin air the divine presence.

Or as Dylan Thomas lyrically stated “ The force that through the green fuse drives the flower.” Fortunately for us; it seems, this mysterious force will continue to “ drive the flowers,” independently of our own personal beliefs or lack of belief.

Jenny Ryan

A LOST OPPORTUNITY, AT BEST

I have just received the December newsletter of Blackpool Unitarians. The minister, Ray Walder, reports on the filming of the ITV Easter Service at Manchester Cathedral on 24th November.

This was conducted by Rev. Paul Travis of Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds. This should have been an excellent opportunity to introduce people to Unitarianism, and maybe to get a few people through our doors.

The service was in most respects indistinguishable from an orthodox Christian service, and the word Unitarian was not mentioned once. Consequently, an opportunity granted to our movement thanks to the liberal approach of Granada TV (*Inquirer*, 1st November) has been lost. Furthermore, if, despite the lack of mention of the word “Unitarian” at Manchester Cathedral that night, the word was used by Granada TV at Easter, it would actually harm the Unitarian movement. Many of our potential attenders find the creeds of orthodoxy empty, hollow and beyond belief, as do many of us; if it is further established in their minds that Unitarianism is merely another brand of Christianity, they won’t come to us either.

Fortunately, power generator failure determined that the service was not filmed. On that note, to be fair to Paul, this happened before he got the chance to deliver his address, which might have consisted of a comprehensive demystification of the content of the rest of the service; nonetheless, the all-over service would have purveyed at best an inaccurate impression of Unitarianism.

Here at Northampton, Fiona opened New Year 2003 by asking for our concerns, many of which centred on how others perceive Unitarianism. Following the somewhat disappointing news described above, this has become my central concern. This is not about chastising people at random and getting them into the habit of attending; but rather about recognising that there are people out there who would really wish to come to us if only they knew that we were there.

What happened in Manchester last month is an extreme example of our problem of misguided packaging. Therefore, my suggested resolution for 2004 is for a more appetising and appropriate packaging of Unitarianism.

Mark Beaumont