



# Northampton Unitarian News

Number 15, January to March 2007

## 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAYS – AFTERNOON EXPLORATIONS

Following a discussion on 26th November, the congregation and ministry student Maud Robinson have decided to extend the service on the 4th Sunday of each month to include a bring-your-own sandwich lunch and some form of workshop / activity.

We will kick off on Sunday 17th December (the 3rd Sunday this month due to the 4th falling on Christmas Eve) by brainstorming ideas for activities / discussion topics for the next six months. Already, members have expressed interest in using Jo Lane's *Spirituality in Everyday Life* course, or in exploring Unitarian and personal approaches to the use of ritual in our worshipping and everyday lives.

Please give some thought to things that you would like to do or discuss. We might consider trying out some different meditation and prayer practices, doing some kind of creative work, or delving into what we are each looking for in a service for worship and why we come. Bring along some ideas and any books or other resources that you think might be useful in planning a programme of exploration.

**Maud Robinson**



## SERVICE TAKERS FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2007

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

14 <sup>th</sup> January	Sue Woolley
28 <sup>th</sup> January	Maud Robinson (part-time Pastor)
11 <sup>th</sup> February	Jon Small
25 <sup>th</sup> February	Maud Robinson (part-time Pastor)
11 <sup>th</sup> March	Mark Beaumont
25 <sup>th</sup> March	Maud Robinson (part-time Pastor)

**All are very welcome!**



## THE SHIP OF HEAVEN

An old creaking ship  
Sails in uncharted  
Waters now  
With teeming humanity  
Mother Earth's  
Prodigal children  
Firmly lashed  
To her prow  
Yet around  
And above her  
On the voice  
Of wind, wave and bird  
Calls one haunting refrain

Is this ship bound  
For God's safe haven?

**Jenny Ryan**

**(inspired by John Glover's painting of the same name in Northampton Museum)**



## VISIT TO THE LAUNCH OF THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE MUSLIM COUNCIL

This took place at the Park Inn Hotel (Moat House) on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> November. The large room in which it was held contained I would estimate over 300 persons, some having to stand at the back - it was clearly seen as an important event by the local Muslims. We were divided into men on the left and women and children on the right. There were hardly any women wearing veils and a group of young girls sitting across from me wouldn't have looked out of place in a disco! I believe it was these younger ones who gave the groan when it was announced that a special guest, Yusuf Islam (the former Cat Stevens) couldn't make it.

There were supporting statements from several contributors including Lord Mohammed Sheikh (Baron Sheikh of Cornhill) and Derek Talbot, the Assistant Chief Constable. The general theme was that dialogue with non-Muslims should be encouraged and that the Muslim youth needed more facilities. The consensus over terrorism was that the so-called suicide (homicide) bombers were criminals, and all citizens, Muslim or otherwise, should condemn their acts as illegal. On the whole I was much encouraged by the general attitude of the speakers and the response from the audience.

The statements were followed by a speech by Yvonne Ridley, a former Express journalist kidnapped in Afghanistan by the Taliban and converted to Islam after being held hostage for 11 days. I found some of her remarks aggressive and noticed a certain amount of vocal support from younger people at the back of the room. I think like many converts she is rather keener those born to it. It appears that she was sacked from the Arabic language TV station Al Jazeera for her "argumentative style". However, I agreed with her condemnation of the Council for not having any women on their committee, and the fact that there are in Northamptonshire some men-only

Mosques. This had a lot more general support, particularly from the right side of the room!

I regretted missing the Q&A session at the end but on the whole I was much encouraged by the general attitude of the speakers and the response from the audience. I see the Council as an opportunity for better understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. I have given them my details and who I represented and hopefully I/we shall hear from them in the future.

**Jon Small**



### **BRIAN PEARCE, DIRECTOR OF UK INTER FAITH NETWORK, ADDRESSES NORTHAMPTON FAITHS FORUM, 2<sup>ND</sup> NOVEMBER 2006**

Brian began with a bit about the Network: it started 20 yrs ago in 1987 and the membership is for bodies, not individuals. Examples are local groups such as NFF, educational bodies, and organizations such as the Three Faiths Forum.

Nine faiths are represented; Bahai, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism. There has been recent rapid growth in local groups, from 70 to 220 in two years. Some problems are the need to limit government interference and the tendency for religious groups to concern themselves largely with their internal concerns rather than the big picture. Brian observed that groups tended to see their problems as being greater than any of the other religions and that their numbers had been underestimated in the 2002 Census! He remarked that we needed a greater level of understanding and respect between groups and recognised that there was a certain reluctance to enter into dialogue.

The second part of the evening was taken up with questions, mostly about the role of the Network and Forums in education. One of the most important points made by a minister was to draw the distinction between Religion, which he said most people saw as “set”, and Faith which he saw as a journey.

Although I believe these people mean well I felt many of them were removed from the actual business of “doing”. However, remarks by some indicated that they were involved in education and were trying out new ideas. A significant point that was made by more than one speaker, was that the main principle behind a religion was hospitality and this was an important path towards understanding other religions and faiths. Brian made the observation that this didn’t have to a formal meal or whatever; it could, and did, happen at work or with a neighbour. This was seen as being probably a better way of understanding a religion than by organised trips to churches, mosques, synagogues &c.

In answering one question Brian did make an unfortunate throwaway remark that may indicate where the Inter Faith Network is coming from. The context was about people of faiths and no faiths. “However, *some* people with no religion *do* have a sense of spirituality” (my italics).

He recommended that we visit religious places, perhaps just turning up, “The chances are you will not be turned away.” He finished with the story of the bank robber who was yet again in front of the beak. “Why do you keep on trying to rob banks?” asked the Judge. He replied, “Because that’s where the money is!” John Joseph’s closing remark was that there is far more in common than differences between our religions.

I came away with a feeling that here was something we should be involved in, perhaps for no other reason than that we are, and have been doing, *something* for quite a while!

**Jon Small**



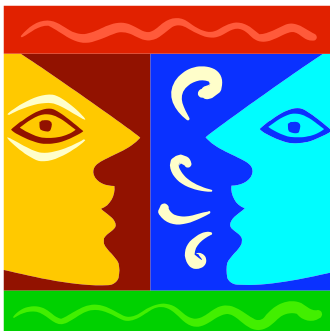
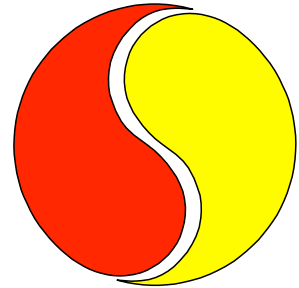
## SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT CIRCLE

Learn to develop your own spirituality in our new  
Spiritual Development Circle

WHERE: 31 Hazelwood Road, Northampton  
WHEN: 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month, 7 pm to 9 pm

Moving on from the Meditation Group we are now going to try a Spiritual Development Circle. This will be a self-help group where we hope to find the psychic abilities we all have to some extent and develop those we wish to. Meetings will start with a short meditation and end the same, but the part in between will be devoted to exploring some aspect of our spiritual abilities. At the first meeting, which will be in February, we are going to try a experiment in psychometry using archaeological artefacts. We will also see if we can plan a few further meetings.

For further information, please contact Jon Small at  
[jonasmall@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:jonasmall@hotmail.co.uk)



## DISCUSSION GROUP

Explore different world religions in our new  
Discussion Group

WHERE: 31 Hazelwood Road, Northampton

WHEN: 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of the month, 7 pm to 9 pm

### THEMES FOR JANUARY TO MARCH MEETINGS

January: no meeting

February: visit to Northampton Synagogue,  
Overstone Road

March: visit to mosque (venue TBC)

For further information, please contact Sue Woolley  
at [sue.woolley@virgin.net](mailto:sue.woolley@virgin.net)

Please send any contributions to  
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2DN or via e-mail to [sue.woolley@virgin.net](mailto:sue.woolley@virgin.net)