



Northampton Unitarian News

Number 16, April to June 2007

“WHAT EXACTLY IS OUR CHURCH OF G-D GOOD FOR?”

The following are extracts from Jon Small's *Chairman's Report* at our Annual General Meeting on 26th March. They speak for themselves.

If Unitarianism were a new, recently formed idea, the more orthodox Churches would have dismissed us as another aspect of New Age Freakdom. We have a problem here – we have the dignity of age behind us, but a carry a “new” idea. Probably our greatest drawback is that we are an old established Church and carry a lot of old established baggage with us. A lot of this baggage *could* be useful. We have to take Freckleton's ideals – that we are a tolerant “Church of Humanity” – and make them work for today. **We are not only of the past – we are relevant and have something to say and something to contribute to today's society.** All we have to do is decide what that is, or find it out – perhaps through dialogue with others. This is perhaps already happening to an extent through our Discussion Group and Development Circle. We are slowly moving into the public view, we are now part of the Faiths Forum and in correspondence with the Muslim Council, but we could do better. I hope that by next year we will be more in the public eye and a few of them will have said, “That sounds good – I'll have some of that.” And join us.

I said in my report last year that we were “moving in the direction of Spirituality, rather than conventional Religion.” That there was a “sea-change within our fellowship – a desire to return to the radical nature of our forebears and break away from the moribund condition.” I think we're on the right track, but we need to do much more in the future. It's safe to be Spiritual.



SERVICE TAKERS FOR APRIL TO JUNE 2007

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

8 th April	Sue Woolley
22 nd April	Maud Robinson (part-time Pastor)
29 th April	Fifth Sunday : visit to Spiritualist Church, Northampton
13 th May	George Sarmezey (Anglican chaplain)
27 th May	Maud Robinson (part-time Pastor)
10 th June	Jon Small
24 th June	Maud Robinson (part-time Pastor)

All are very welcome!

A VISIT TO KIDDERMINSTER

This year, on Saturday 31st March, Sue and I went to the AGM of the Midland Union of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches held at the New Meeting House, Kidderminster. This is a magnificent pile fronted with Old Red Sandstone that is found around here and gives, to me a Northamptonian, an unusual reddish tone to the soil. These are my impressions of the day.

The AGM was held in the Assembly Rooms adjacent to the Church; they were rather cold to start with, but soon warmed up after everyone had arrived. It was an opportunity to meet some old faces like Barbara and Ken Russell and an old friend of mine from Warwick, Malcolm Sadler. I understand the turnout was very good and I had plenty of time to talk to people and make some new friends. The Secretary of seven years, Roger Mathews, had decided to stand down, and our own Secretary, Sue Woolley was elected to take his place. This means we have someone on the inside of the Midland Union!

The main AGM was immediately followed for some of us by the Association of Midland Union Lay Preachers and Service Leaders AGM, which was held in the nearby, smaller (and warmer) Pearsall Room. The Officers of the Midland Union are automatically ex-officio holders of the same posts within the Association, so Sue is the Secretary here as well! This meeting didn't take too long and we returned to the Assembly Rooms where the others were waiting to attack the magnificent spread that had been laid on.

After lunch, a short Service was led by the new President, Alison Thursfield, with music by Malcolm Sadler and an interesting reading about back-scratchers by the Rev. Peter Hewis, I have a feeling you will hear this reading from Sue in a future service! I was particularly pleased by Alison's reference to the Golden Rule and the insight that Hillel's version actually casts a different light on the application of this principle, I have a feeling that you will be hearing some version of this from me in the future!

Later we were addressed by Sir Peter Soulsby of the GA's Executive Committee, who fielded some very hard questions. This session has been written up by Sue (see elsewhere in this newsletter) and we agreed on the way home that Peter had come out with some good replies, honest admissions and generated along with his audience some thought-provoking ideas. I think we both felt that it had been a productive day.

This is the second time recently that I have been reminded that we are not alone here in Northampton, that there are, out there, others of a like mind with whom we can share our problems, insights and help. After Sue was elected she said that she intends to visit all the congregations in the Union in the next year so she is known not only as a name on a piece of paper but as a face, a real person. She finished by distributing a leaflet she has produced, *What your District Association can do for You* – several members had already seen this and agreed that it was very good. I've read it, and it says, better than I can, what I have tried to say above.

I learned a lot that Saturday and came home with some good ideas churning about in my head, which I shall be sharing, and the conclusion that we have a rather good Secretary!

Jon Small



“WE’VE GOT AN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – WHAT NOW?”

This was the title of an interesting and thought-provoking talk by Sir Peter Soulsby, the Midland Union representative on the GA Executive Committee, given to Midland Union members at our AGM on 31st March.

He had a lot to say, and I was scribbling notes frantically. If anyone wants to see them, please ask. But the general gist of his talk was that the Executive Committee had now been in existence for 12 months, had finished the groundwork, and was now preparing to make a difference. Peter commented that it is the GA and the District Associations that are the embodiment of a commitment to mutual wellbeing and interdependence. He emphasised the importance of a close connection between the GA and the District Associations, as it is the latter that have the essential links with individual congregations, and also the critical mass of volunteers who know what is needed at a local level and can ensure that support, help and information are provided where they are needed.

He then fielded a very tough question and answer session with great aplomb and a refreshing honesty and integrity. Both Jon and I were much impressed with him, and came away feeling reassured that the Executive Committee has quite a few of the right ideas, and is moving slowly in the right directions.

Sue Woolley

OUR NEW LAY PREACHER

Sue Woolley, our Secretary and Newsletter Editor, has just completed the Unitarian Worship Studies Course. Run under the auspices of the GA’s Joined Up Education Panel, it consists of three steps: Foundation Step, Preliminary Step, and Advanced Step. Sue was given exemption from the Foundation Step because of the services she had already taken, and started the Preliminary Step in March 2006.

For this she had to put together one service for each of the four modules – Biblical Studies, Unitarian Theology and Thought, Unitarian History and World Religions. The Advanced Step was a bit more demanding – students are required to produce SIX services for each of the four modules – 24 in all. Then seven of the 28 services have to be assessed by actually delivering them to a congregation – I assessed Sue on several occasions here in Northampton.

Sue told me: “I’ve found the course absolutely fascinating – I’ve learned so much about the Bible, about other world religions, and above all, about our own denomination. I would recommend the course to anybody – you don’t have to do the services; if you just want to find out more about Unitarianism and the rest, you can enrol on the Unitarian Studies Course instead, which covers the same ground, but you do essays instead of services.”

Sue completed the course in February 2007 – which is quite a lot quicker than expected! She will be receiving her certificate from President David Dawson at the General Assembly meeting in Hatfield in April. This means that she is a fully-qualified Unitarian Lay Preacher, and her name will be added to the GA Roll of Lay Preachers. Ever a glutton for punishment, she has now registered with the Open University to work towards their Diploma in Religious Studies, which, she says “should keep me out of trouble for the next three years!” Her new studies will start in February 2008. In the meantime, Sue will be taking one service a month at Hazelwood Road, starting in July.

Well done, Sue!

Jon Small

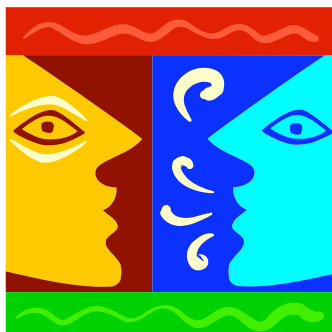
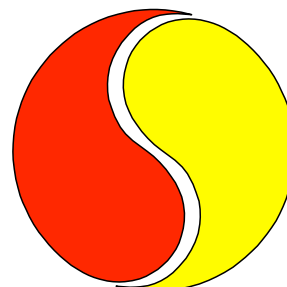
SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT CIRCLE

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

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

This is a self-help group where we hope to discover the psychic abilities we all have to some degree, and develop those we wish to. ~ Meetings start and end with a short meditation, but the part between is devoted to exploring some aspect of our spiritual abilities. ~ We have already tried an experiment in psychometry using archaeological material from sites in and around Northamptonshire, and a Creative Visualisation of our own individual "Wise One." ~ We decide the next month's theme at the end of each session.

For further information, please contact Jon Small at
jonasmall@hotmail.co.uk



DISCUSSION GROUP

Explore different world religions in our
Discussion Group

WHERE: 31 Hazelwood Road, Northampton

WHEN: 1st Tuesday of the month, 7 pm to 9 pm

THEMES FOR APRIL TO JUNE MEETINGS
April: visit to Abington Avenue mosque 7.30pm
May: TBC
June: visit to Christian Science Reading Rooms
(time TBC)

For further information, please contact Sue Woolley
at sue.woolley@virgin.net

Please send any contributions to
Sue Woolley, 5 Martins Road,
Piddington, Northampton NN7
2DN or via e-mail to sue.woolley@virgin.net