



Northampton Unitarian News

Number 19, October to December 2007

CONGREGATIONAL SERVICE: OUR RELIGIOUS HERO / INSPIRATION

A couple of times a year, we like to have a Congregational Service – that is, one that is not led by one particular person, but to which all contribute. Such a service took place on Sunday 22nd July. It was fascinating to hear how other members of the congregation have been inspired by a very disparate group of people. The people who have inspired us included:

- Anthony Freeman – a former Anglican priest, who had to leave the Church of England because of his views. We heard an extract from his book *God In Us: the case for Christian Humanism*.
- St. Benedict – having watched the TV series *The Monastery*, one member of the congregation became interested in the Rule of St. Benedict, and revealed that it is not just meant for monastics, but as a guide to living for everyone.
- Pope John Paul I, whose reign was so promising in terms of the potential liberalisation of the Roman Catholic Church, but so brief – what if he had lived?
- William James, “physician, naturalist, artist, psychologist, philosopher, religious thinker, psychic researcher, drug experimenter, writer, lecturer, and professor. One of the most influential Americans of his time, his impact remains undiminished 100 years after his death, primarily through his classic 1902 book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.” [Ekaterina Roubina]
- As an example of people who are rebels: Ian Gillan, singer with seventies band Deep Purple (and later with other bands), an original wild child whose songs always go deep.
- Akhenaton – the Ancient Egyptian pharaoh who came close to introducing monotheism with the sun as a symbol of God.
- Sandy Ellis – Midland Union treasurer and loving father.

As usual, I came away grateful for the sharing of insights by my Unitarian friends, and with a feeling of respect and love for all of them. **SW**

SERVICE TAKERS FOR OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2007

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

14 th October	Sue Woolley
28 th October	Mark Beaumont
11 th November	Sue Woolley (Remembrance Sunday)
25 th November	TBC
9 th December	Sue Woolley
23 rd December	Congregational Christmas Service

All are very welcome!

FIFTH SUNDAY VISIT TO BOUGHTON GREEN

On Sunday 29th July, we visited Boughton Green, and the ruined church of St. John the Baptist. I was rather worried that the weather would cause us to cancel. However, it turned out fine with some sunshine and scudding clouds across a blue sky.

The turnout was only three, but this, like the weather, did not dampen our spirits. The Green was covered with what looked like tall, rank, dead weeds, that on examination proved to be the remains of a harvested crop of lupins. Entry to the churchyard is by a tall, iron kissing-gate that creaked when opened, making a sound that the Hammer House of Horror Film Company would have been proud of! However, this was the only eerie aspect of the place; the churchyard was lush and green, no doubt due to the recent rains, and the sun came out as we made our way down the path to the remains of the church.

Since the 18th century when the spire fell down, the structure has slowly succumbed to the ravages of nature and today there is no sign of the remains of the spire or tower. I would imagine the stone has been carted away and could perhaps be found in the walls of cottages and barns nearby. What does remain is most of the east wall, with an ornate niche that must have been above the altar, some of the south wall, and the three sides of a side chapel that must have been added to the north of the church after it had been built in the 13th century. The floor is carpeted in a fine green lawn and the atmosphere (I am pleased to say) was as I had promised. It has that calm, meditative and *secret* quality that is difficult to find today. The Victorian Romantics must have loved this place with its ivy-covered walls.

Beneath the east wall, and effectively under the altar, is the spring. This, however, we did not visit, as the path to it was choked in yard-high nettles, no doubt a legacy of this year's climate! We stood about (it was still damp from the night's rain) and speculated on what it must have looked like when it was in use, and the details of its construction and extension, and then read our contributions. We all agreed it was a beautiful place, and spoke of intentions to visit again.

Leaving the churchyard with its peaceful atmosphere and rabbits, we drove a short distance to look at Philadelphus Jeyes' house that resembles a small castle, and the Spectacle, which is a gate with a castellated tower flanking each side and leading nowhere.

One interesting thing has since occurred. I was asking as to the location of the Shepherd's Maze, a turf uni-cursal maze that was on the Green until the First World War. I surmised that it was at the edge of the Green near the church, as turf mazes were often used for penances, and as a substitute for pilgrimage. The Heritage Hunters of Northampton have volunteered to help the Central Library Local Collection catalogue a large number of newspaper cuttings collected between the mid-18th century and World War One. As a member, I went along to help, and as luck would have it, I was given Boughton Parish to sort out. The first cutting I examined mentioned the Maze and said it was in the centre of the Green. One more mystery solved!

Jon Small

WALK IN THE WOODS

Our visit to Salcey Forest has become somewhat of an annual event. This year, after such a poor summer, we were blessed by a lovely, sunshiny day. We took the Elephant Walk which leads to the new-ish Tree Top Walk, an impressive wooden structure that rises through the forest to a platform, from which fantastic views of the county can be seen. We spent the time in convivial conversation, simply enjoying one another's company and the fine, balmy weather.

Once back in the car park, we visited the café for a sustaining snack before returning home.

SW

DISCUSSION GROUP RELAUNCHED IN STYLE!

We are delighted to report that our Discussion Group is back in business again, after a break over the Summer. Our first topic of the season was *Do animals have souls?* **Jon Small** reports:

Our first meeting of this season began with five people attending, and led to a lively and wide-ranging discussion. Definitions of what a soul is were attempted, and items brought up included self-awareness, reincarnation, body, soul & spirit, the Ghost in the Machine and the Blind Watchmaker.

The general consensus was that such animals as primates and cats and dogs and mammals generally probably do have souls, but the jury was out when it came to such creatures as worms, snails and micro-organisms. It was felt by some of us that perhaps a requirement for having a soul was the ability to recognise oneself as an individual.

We could have gone on long after nine o'clock, but near the end we took a vote, which was unanimously in favour of animals having souls, if souls actually exist. I was ready for the next question "do such plants as trees have souls?", but we had run out of time!

Details of the next three meetings are on the back page of this newsletter.

DO FAITHS UNITE OR DIVIDE? REPORT OF A NORTHAMPTON INTER-FAITH FORUM MEETING ON 6TH SEPTEMBER 2007

Jon and I attended this interesting evening, hosted by the Northampton Synagogue, with guest speaker Sally Keeble, MP. Representatives from the Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and Jewish communities were there, as well as our noble selves.

Sally started the evening by outlining the three principles that she saw as the fundamentals of society: parliamentary democracy; the rule of law (civil not religious) and equality before the law in terms of gender, sexual orientation, age and race. She also emphasised that the rights of the individual should be respected. She stated that the faith communities have a strong role in building a good society. They are important in that they give an identity to an area, and for service delivery. She mentioned the need for a faith infrastructure in Northampton, in order to add a spiritual dimension for the town to grow within. She also said that good relations are built on mutual respect.

Her talk was followed by a wide-ranging discussion, with contributions from all the faith groups there present. Some of the points raised included:

- The need to put the emphasis, both in education and in the home, on respect for other faiths, and what we have in common, rather than our differences.
- Everyone needs to work together. The importance of bodies such as the Inter-Faith Forum and inter-faith dialogue. The need for a common point to meet. The need to get rid of the mystery and to foster mutual respect.
- But, there does need to be social integration, otherwise our faiths can divide society.
- We start from different perspectives, but can work together for the good of the whole community.
- The idea of a modern all-faiths equivalent of the YMCA youth club (Young People's Inter-Faith Association?) a place where young people of all faiths and none could socialise and get to know one another as human beings.
- Good community relations are about both policies and people. We need both to make a difference to a community. Engagement between human beings.

All in all there was much food for thought, and Jon and I were impressed by the positive and inclusive attitudes shown by other members of the Forum. **SW**

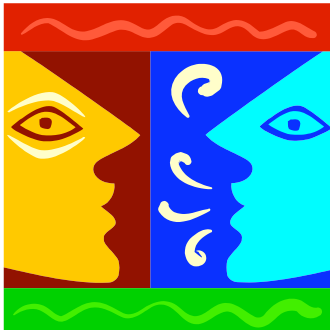
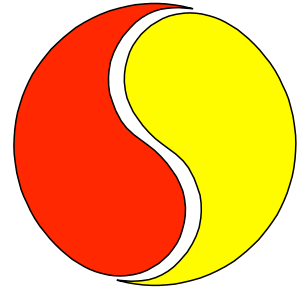


SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT CIRCLE

We regret to announce that due to the burden of organisation for all church affairs falling on the same few pairs of shoulders every month, the Spiritual Development Circle is now in abeyance for the foreseeable future.

Should anyone else wish to step forward to take responsibility for this activity (on third Tuesdays of the month) please speak to Jon Small or Sue Woolley, or any member of the Management Committee.

You are very welcome to join us either on 2nd / 4th Sundays at 10.30 am, or at the Discussion Group on the 1st Tuesday of the month.



DISCUSSION GROUP

Explore current / spiritual issues in our new Discussion Group, relaunching in September

WHERE: 31 Hazelwood Road, Northampton

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

THEMES FOR OCTOBER – DECEMBER MEETINGS

October: *Are angels real?*

November: *Should assisted suicide be legal in the UK?*

December: *Spirituality is for life, not just for Christmas*

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