



Northampton Unitarian News

Number 21, April to June 2008

“INSIGHTS I HAVE ACQUIRED FROM OUR DISCUSSION GROUP”

The following are extracts from Jon Small's *Chairman's Report* at our Annual General Meeting on 23rd March.

“If I have learnt one thing this year it has come from our Discussion Group, a small but dedicated bunch who chew over such fundamental topics as “Is G-D a bloke?” “Are There Such Things as Angels?” and “Do Animals Have Souls?” It is these discussions I am sure that have caused me to think more deeply about *exactly what I do think*. As a result I have started to write a number of essays – not particularly for public consumption, but mainly just to get my own ideas in order. The subjects, to date I have chosen are; G-D; Love; Beauty; Reincarnation; Peace; Justice; Heaven. I recognize that the ideas I have of these and any new topics that come up may change from year to year and I am writing (contributing) to three at the moment at the same time, adding the odd paragraph or so when the Muse strikes me and then dating them – if I keep it up it might be interesting to look at them in a few years and see how my ideas have matured (or degenerated!).”

“Now for the insight I have acquired from our Discussion Group. For years I held a certain level of hostility towards Christianity that stemmed partly from unfortunate experiences in my childhood and the adolescent period of idealism when I observed first hand the hypocrisy of the Church and its leaders. Although I have grown out of that attitude some little part of it has always remained there in the background. Since then I have come to the conclusion that Joshua bar Joseph (Jesus Christ) was the Messiah and therefore had the authority to re-write part of the Torah as to the “Eleventh Commandment” (614th!) i.e. the doctrine of Love, but I could not go along with all the baggage the Church attached to his teachings.

For a long time now I have realised two things; that I threw the baby out with the bath water, and that had I been born a Muslim or of some other religion I could have come to the same sort of conclusions about *that* faith! What I needed was some sort of outlook/idea that summed up my relationship with Christianity now. Why Christianity, and not any of the other faiths? The reason is that I was brought up in this faith and where it is easy to be tolerant of other belief systems and accept their differences from one's own ideas it's not so easy with the one you grew up with. I can't remember which discussion we were at, but Sue made a remark which I later recognized was the one that summed up what my relationship with modern Christianity is, she said, “I'm a cultural Christian.”

Well, Sue thanks for that, for so am I, whether I like it or not, I shall throughout this incarnation at the deeper levels still think from a Christian viewpoint, but now I know where I stand and I can now accept this new insight into my Life Script and make allowances for it.”

Jon Small



SERVICE TAKERS FOR APRIL TO JUNE 2008

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

13 th April	Rev. Peter Hewis (Vice-President, Midland Union)
27 th April	Rev. George Sarmezey (Anglican Chaplain, NGH)
11 th May	Mrs. Alison Thursfield (President, Midland Union)
25 th May	Congregational Service (theme to be announced)
8 th June	Mrs. Sue Woolley
22 nd June	Mr. Jon Small
29 th June	Summer Celebration

All are very welcome!



POSITIVE IMAGE – MAXIMUM IMPACT: UNITARIAN COMMUNICATION COORDINATORS CONFERENCE 2008, NIGHTINGALE CENTRE, GREAT HUCKLOW

I attended this conference for the first time at the end of February, and will certainly be going back next year.

We started on the Friday afternoon with a PowerPoint workshop. The first “proper” session, after a delicious buffet supper, was an information exchange, during which all 35 delegates explained why they were there, and shared their areas of expertise. I met Chris Granger, a new-ish member of the Derby congregation, who is a web wizard. During the weekend, we had some very interesting discussions about Unitarian websites (the GA one in particular, and on general principles) and I have come away with some good ideas for updating our own Northampton website.

Saturday included four fascinating and very different sessions: Julie Dadson, the Nightingale Centre’s manager, gave a presentation on marketing the Centre; James Wallbank from Sheffield led a very interesting workshop on refreshing and maintaining websites (which also gave me lots of ideas); Kate Taylor, of Wakefield, a very experienced journalist, gave us lots of tips about how to organise press releases and get them published; and Neville Kenyon led a noticeboard workshop. This last included no less than 90 full-colour PowerPoint slides, showing photographs of noticeboards from all over the country, in all their glory (or otherwise!). It was a graphic and very effective lesson on how [not] to present our congregations to the outside world! The GA is currently offering £250 grants towards renewing or replacing noticeboards, and your Management Committee is going to take up their kind offer.

We then had a wide-ranging discussion about the work of the GA Communications Commission, with many expressing disappointment with the new website. It was decided that a GA Web Panel should be set up to review it, and to help congregations with their own websites, and this is gradually going ahead.

The weekend finished on Sunday morning with a “Where next?” session, followed by an enjoyable service given by Rev. David Shaw in Great Hucklow Chapel. **SW**

BITS AND PIECES

Midland Union AGM, Park Lane Unitarian Chapel, Cradley.

This is happening on Saturday 5th April, and Jon Small will be attending on behalf of Northampton Unitarians. More news in the next newsletter.

Peter Wright, Midland Union President

Very sadly, Peter Wright, who was well-known to us all in Northampton, died of cancer of the thyroid in March after a few months of illness. His funeral is on Monday 7th April at Oat Street Chapel, Evesham. The following is an extract from a tribute written by Sandy Ellis, which will be appearing in the next edition of *MU Now*:

“Peter was elected to the Midland Union Executive Committee in 1998, becoming Vice-President the following year and President in 2001. He was a member of the Investment Committee from 2001 until his death. During his presidency in 2001, he initiated the Lay Preacher Training Course at Evesham, which formed the basis of the ABCs handbook published in 2003 and has been widely sold throughout the Denomination. After his retirement from the Prison Service, Peter dedicated himself to voluntary service, becoming a Carer with the Macmillan Unit in Evesham, and also a regular driver for St. Richard’s Hospice in Worcester. He was also a much welcomed Lay Preacher in Midland Union churches, his annual ‘Animals Service’ at Coseley being especially popular. And that really exemplifies what this modest and unassuming man was all about: he showed his love and care for his fellows in a very practical way. He had a wonderful sense of fun and was quite the kindest and most generous man I’ve ever known. The world is a better place for his having been with us. We are grateful for having known him and extend our love and sympathy to Doreen, Julian, Eleanor, and Peter’s grandchildren, in their loss.”

General Assembly Meetings 2008, Hatfield.

These are taking place in the last week of March, and Sue Woolley will be attending as delegate for Northampton Unitarians. Fiona Boyle will also be attending the “Growth Day” on the Friday. More news in the next newsletter.

Worship Studies Course Foundation Step

The Midland Union is running a course covering the syllabus for this on three Saturdays in June, July and August 2008, at Kingswood Unitarians, Hollywood, near Birmingham. The course covers the following areas:

- What is worship?
- Practicalities and precautions
- Speech and communication
- Readings
- Prayers
- Storytelling / catering for children in a service
- Hymns and music
- Sermon / address

After completing the course, you will need to deliver two assessed services, in order to get your Foundation Step certificate from the GA’s Joined Up Education Panel.

If you take services, and would like to know more, please contact Sue Woolley, who is coordinating this for the Midland Union.





DISCUSSION GROUP

Explore current / spiritual issues 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: *What is the soul?*

May: *The meaning and purpose of prayer*

June: *How true are scriptures?*

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

The Committee is currently revisiting our constitution. When a Draft has been agreed, a Special General Meeting will be called, in order for members to ratify it. Watch this space!