



Northampton Unitarian News

Number 22, July to September 2008

BRIDGEMAKERS: CONNECTING PEOPLE ACROSS COMMUNITIES

At the end of April, Jon Small and I attended a meeting of the Northampton Faiths Forum at the Quaker Meeting House in Northampton. The speaker was Richard Thompson, founder of the Bridgemakers initiative.

He started with a quotation from Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

The idea of Bridgemakers is a very simple one. People of different faiths meet in each other's houses and learn that their common humanity is more important than theological differences.

The way it works is this: an overall coordinator (probably a steering group set up by Northampton Faiths Forum in our case) "finds" an even number of "live wires" from different faith communities; people who are willing to pick up the idea and run with it. These live wires are then paired with each other (which is why it's important to have an even number) and go back to their faith communities and ask for an even number of volunteer couples or families. These are then "paired up" with a family or couple (which could be two single people) from the other faith community, and share a simple meal together. To quote from the website (www.bridgemakers.org.uk) "A family or two friends from one community invite a family or two friends from a different community and during the next four months pay them a return visit. The same process is repeated with a different community. Altogether they meet 3 families in a year.

Bridgemakers brings people together and finds that they have more in common than they have differences. Bridgemakers is building connections between people in different communities."

The website explains that "Coordinators, who are volunteers, are the key. Each one of them finds five or six families or couples in their community. The coordinators meet together and work in pairs to match their families/couples. Each participant is given simple guidelines, basic principles and useful questions to help on their first visit. The whole process occurs three times in a year. For example a Church of England family may receive and visit a Jewish, a Muslim and a Quaker family. A simple evaluation is made by the coordinator keeping in touch. At the end of the year there may be a celebration."

The reception for the idea taking off in Northampton was enthusiastic. Between 50 and 75 people were present, and I think we all felt that although it would be hard work to set up in the first place, it would be well worth the trouble if the result was the building of bridges between our communities.

SW

SERVICE TAKERS FOR JULY TO SEPTEMBER 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 July	Rev. Don Phillips (Cotswold Group)
27 th July	Rev. Bill Simons (Anglican minister)
10 th August	Mrs. Sue Woolley
24 th August	Congregational Service (theme: Values)
31 st August	A Walk in the Park (see below)
14 th September	Ms. Dorothy Haughton (Shrewsbury)
28 th September	Mr. Jon Small (Anniversary Service)



A Walk in the Park: We will be meeting on the pavement opposite the entrance to Abington Park Museum, on 31st August, at 10.30 a.m., taking a gentle stroll through the Park in the sunshine (we hope!), and then adjourning to the Park's café for refreshments before taking our leave. Just for the pleasure of spending some time in each other's company. Hope to see you there!

All are very welcome!



REVEREND DEATH: A UNITARIAN RESPONSE TO THE PROGRAMME ON CHANNEL 4, MONDAY 19TH MAY 2008.

This two hour documentary programme by Jon Ronson, a journalist with *The Guardian*, was about a **so-called "Unitarian minister"** named George Exoo.

Exoo is a leader in the American right-to-die movement, and has assisted over a hundred people to die. Ronson was initially in favour of assisted-suicide, but in the four years he followed Exoo around America, he became more and more horrified at what Exoo was doing. He was helping people who were more in need of psychiatric help, to kill themselves. Exoo's justification is his belief that "life after life" was so much better than what we have here, but his recently recruited assistant named Susan, appears to be downright evil and seems to be motivated mainly by profit.

I myself, am probably in favour of euthanasia for those who have horrific terminal illnesses and whose quality of life is really dreadful, but the people Exoo was "helping" weren't like that – they were sad people who needed counselling, not death. And his cosy pastoral manner was truly creepy – he obviously believed that he was

doing his best for these people. At one point he said "I've never done anything as important as this in my ministry. I think it's the reason I was placed on this planet. I'm a midwife to the dying, for those who want to hasten their deaths." His clients were referred to him by the mainstream right-to-die organisations, who wouldn't help people who weren't terminally ill, because they believed it is wrong.

This programme could damage the reputation of British Unitarians by suggesting that "Unitarians are the ones that help people to die". Although Exoo was referred to several times as a Unitarian minister, **he resigned from ministerial fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association in 2001**. There was even a brief interview with his successor in Beckley, West Virginia, who mentioned that Unitarians are in favour of the right to die, which muddies the waters even further. **That's not true, especially in this country**. Our attitude is described by Rev. Cliff Reed, when he writes "Most Unitarians would see tackling evil and the suffering it causes as a higher priority. As adult individuals, we are responsible for ourselves. Our prime task is to examine what we do and think. Then it is to direct our own lives in such a way that they will be a blessing to those whose lives we touch." **In other words, British Unitarians believe in helping others to improve the quality of their lives, not to end them.**

SW



BITS AND PIECES

Our new constitution

At a Special General Meeting on Sunday 8th June 2008, it was agreed by those present that we adopt a new constitution. It is based on the "model constitution" recommended by the Midland Union. Copies are available from Sue Woolley on request, and will be circulated to all members once the constitution has been ratified by the Charity Commission.

Welcome to our new member

We are delighted to announce that we have a new member – the first for several years. Joanne McGeehan started by attending our Tuesday Discussion Group, but soon started coming to Sunday worship too. She was welcomed into our community at a special service on Sunday 8th June.

Northampton Unitarians website

Our website has been given a fresh new look, in line with the General Assembly's Consistent Identity guidelines. As well as this, the opportunity was taken to include a new "news and events" page, which includes up-to-the-minute information on what is happening, both here at Northampton, and in the wider Unitarian community. It will also include news of forthcoming events organised by the Northampton Faiths Forum. You can find it at www.northamptonunitarians.org.uk



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 JULY - SEPTEMBER MEETINGS

July: *Can Truth be known?*

August: *Do we have free will?*

September: *Does evil exist?*

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

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

Northampton Unitarians have been chosen to pilot the new Hibbert Trust Practical Spirituality course, which is being launched in 2010. This is your chance to influence how our denomination "sells" Unitarianism to people outside the movement. The evening will be facilitated by Fiona Boyle.

WHERE: 31, Hazelwood Road, Northampton

WHEN: Tuesday 16th September 2008

TIME: 7.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.

It promises to be a very interesting evening, and will include a shared meal (provided by Northampton Unitarians). We would love as many members and attenders as possible to join us, so that we can make a properly representative report back to the Hibbert Trust.

16TH SEPTEMBER: PUT THE DATE IN YOUR DIARY NOW!

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