



Northampton Unitarian News

Number 23, October - December 2008



A WALK IN THE PARK 31ST AUGUST 2008

This planned “gentle stroll in the sunshine” proved to be somewhat different – more like a swift trip through the rain. To be fair, it didn’t rain *all* the time, but it did put something of a damper on the day.

There were three of us from Northampton, Joanne, Marc and myself; Leicester Unitarian Fellowship was well represented along with two from Market Harborough. We met up at 10:30 and the Umbrella Fair, an annual environmental event started at 12:00. This was a bonus as we didn’t know it was to be on this day until a few weeks ago. The first part of the morning was spent by walking around the park looking at the earthworks of the Deserted Medieval Village. These are so useful as they provide me with a chance to show people how archaeologists recognize significant sites. The park has good examples of features; a “holloway” – a medieval road that can be seen running through the grass and appearing to come from the rear of Archway Cottages. We also saw wide expanses of “ridge and furrow” – the remains of the old three field strip farming system and several clearly defined house platforms. Because the grass was so wet we tended to stick to the paths so I didn’t have the pleasure to leading the group across the ridge and furrow, as walking across it really brings home the nature of this feature. I think our visitors were impressed by our park with its fine collection of trees [including a Chinese Ghost Tree, sometimes called a Handkerchief Tree] and the beautiful lakes.

We retired to the café and fortified ourselves with tea &c. where John joined us. During the conversation it was realized that there is to some extent a lack of communication between us and Leicester because they are not in the Midland Union and it was resolved that this should not continue and I feel a visit to Leicester is on the horizon.

Whilst we were in the café the rain increased, but had more or less stopped when we left to look at the now open Umbrella Fair. Later the rain came back and after a while it was time for our friends from the north to leave, probably for home, warm fires and dry clothes!

Jon Small



SERVICE TAKERS FOR OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2008

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

12 th October	Joanne McGeehan
26 th October	Mark Beaumont
9 th November	Jon Small (Remembrance Sunday)
23 rd November	Winnie Gordon (Birmingham UNM)
30 th November	Visit to 78 Dergate (Fifth Sunday) (TBC)
14 th December	Sue Woolley
21 st December	Congregational Service (theme: Endings & Beginnings)

We are planning to have a bring-and-share lunch after the service on 21st December – see Jon to let him know what you can bring.

All are very welcome!



OUR DIVERSE VALUES: CONGREGATIONAL SERVICE 24TH AUGUST

Six of us participated in the latest Congregational Service on 24th August. The theme was values, and the resultant service was fascinating.

- **Martin** said that he valued the company of the like-minded people he finds in this congregation. The joy of being able to speak one's mind without fear of being judged.
- **Mark** gave us an quotation from Shelley, which demonstrated the Unitarian value of unity in diversity. He then shared a musical metaphor – we are all soloists in a chamber music group, producing a harmonious whole. We then listened to Mozart's *Adagio*, which illustrated this very effectively.
- The things **Jon** values include freedom, health, intelligence, perception and love. Also the universal beauty of nature, and the way that light can be seen as not only physical, but also mental and spiritual.
- **Joanne** mused that it was difficult to pick something particular out – there is a great choice of things to value. While she was thinking about what to say, she watched a documentary about how pedigree dogs are being bred for looks to the detriment of their health, which seems to say that our society values superficial, exterior beauty instead of what is underneath. We need to value the familiar things in our lives as well as the exotic.
- **Sue** spoke of the Unitarian values of freedom, reason and tolerance, which she sees as the underlying principles and standards that make our fellowship in diversity possible. We all have the same attitude to religion and spirituality, although our individual beliefs may be very different.
- **Becky** believes that there is good as well as bad in everyone. Everyone has the right to be listened to, and we shouldn't judge people, because we have not led their lives. Especially, we shouldn't judge people by appearances – we are all human, and all look different. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Our next Congregational Service is on Sunday 21st December, on the theme of *Endings and Beginnings*.

NORTHAMPTON UNITARIANS DEMONSTRATE AGAINST CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM AT ABINGTON PARK

In the local Chronicle & Echo there has recently been some controversy about the covering up of part of a display about evolution as a result of a complaint apparently by a fundamentalist Christian, and the local Secular Society and Socialist Party arranged a small demonstration outside the Museum which I am proud to say all of the Unitarians present [Joanne, Jon, Marc and myself] attended. This went off peacefully without any rioting and the police, who happened to have their Information Truck nearby, had to be content with talking to interested passers-by. The organizer, who I believe is something in the Secular Society, and myself began an interesting dialogue, but were unfortunately interrupted by two fellows who kept insisting that "evolution hasn't been proved" and seemed unable to see the difference between Science and Faith. **JS**

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY: THE DVD

Northampton Unitarians were chosen to take part in the pilot scheme for this new DVD / discussion based course, which is being put together by the Hibbert Trust. Rev. David Usher, District Minister of the LDPA, is leading it.

Four of us gathered for the two-hour session on 16th September. Proceedings formally started with the lighting of a candle, followed by a 'check-in', during which each of us expressed our personal joys and concerns. We then shared a reading 'What is spirituality?' by Deane Starr, which established the parameters for the session.

Next came a shared meal – Fiona had provided a variety of delicious 'nibbles', which we all enjoyed.

The central part of the evening was watching the 30-minute DVD, which highlighted the differences between religion and spirituality, and mused about why spiritual seeking is so common these days – the loss of community, perhaps. It is envisaged that it will be one of six DVDs, making up the *Practical Spirituality* course.

The first section was introduced by David Usher, followed by a panel discussion with Ruth Gledhill, Religions Correspondent with *The Times*, and Adrian Smith, a minister and author of several books about contemporary spirituality. The content was very interesting and well-delivered, but the presentation was a bit odd – we felt that it would have been more suitable as a Radio 4 programme. Some of the issues covered were as follows:

- What are the differences between religion and spirituality? It was suggested that people today are more interested in spiritual experience than religious belief, and that many find the church / chapel 'setting' and 'rituals' off-putting.
- It was agreed that there has been a movement 'from head to heart', but that balance was also needed. This is where being a member of a religious community can be so helpful.
- Comments were also made about the 'dark places' to which unstructured spiritual seeking can take the unwary. This was not to say that religion has no dark side – cults and sects were mentioned as examples of this. But it was generally felt that a community can provide balance and a safe place from which to explore one's spirituality.

The DVD ended with a mini-meditation by David Usher about being aware of yourself at all levels – physical, mental and spiritual.

We then discussed what we had seen and commented on both the content and the presentation of the DVD. All participants were asked to complete a feedback form, which will be sent back to the Hibbert Trust. We concluded that it was a very worthwhile project, but that the content and presentation needed some 'tweaking'.

The session ended with a final 'check-out' during which we shared how we felt at the end of the session, and then the candle was blown out. **SW**



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 OCTOBER - DECEMBER MEETINGS

October: *The seven deadly sins – still relevant today?*

November: *Does science threaten religion?*

December: *What does Jesus mean to Unitarians?*

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

OURSELVES AS OTHERS SEE US – FOUND BY JON WHEN RESEARCHING A SERVICE

A Liberal Protestant sect which holds as its distinctive tenet the belief in a uni-personal instead of a tri-personal God. In short, present-day Unitarianism is hardly more than natural religion, and exhibits in some of its members a pronounced tendency towards Pantheistic speculation. The Church polity in England and America is strictly congregational; each individual congregation manages, without superior control, all its affairs, calls and discharges its minister, and is the final judge of the religious views expressed in its pulpit.

In Transylvania the Church government is exercised by a bishop who resides at Kolozsvar (Klausenburg) and is assisted by a consistory. The episcopal title which he bears does not imply special consecration but merely designates the office of an ecclesiastical supervisor.

The bond of union between them consists more in their anti-dogmatic tendency than in uniformity of belief. The authority of the Bible is in some degree retained; but its contents are either admitted or repudiated according as they find favour before the supreme, and in this case, exacting tribunal of individual reason.

Catholic Encyclopaedia.

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