



## Northampton Unitarians News

*A spiritual fellowship, encouraging tolerance, reason  
and independent thought*

**Issue 26, July – September 2009**

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### Statement of Belief (taken from our website)

Unitarianism is a religious movement in which individuals are free to follow their reason and conscience; there is no pressure from creed or scripture. We are open to change in the light of new thought and discoveries.

#### We believe that:

- everyone has the right to seek truth and meaning for themselves.
- the fundamental tools for doing this are your own life experience, your reflection upon it, your intuitive understanding and the promptings of your own conscience.
- the best place to do this is a community that welcomes you for who you are, complete with your beliefs, doubts and questions.

#### We offer:

- liberty of conscience and freedom from imposed creed, confessions and dogmas.
- a fellowship where people come together to worship; to share times of celebration and trial; and to help each other in the quest for a faith to live by.

**We affirm** the universal values of love and compassion, peace, truth and justice.

**We welcome** all who come to us in the spirit of goodwill and enquiry, regardless of ethnic or religious background, age, gender or sexual orientation.

*Our thanks to the General Assembly Information Department, for extracts from 'A faith worth thinking about' by Peter Sampson et al; and to Ipswich Unitarians for extracts from a leaflet by Cliff Reed.*

## Chairman's Bit

Welcome to our new-look newsletter. Here is Chairman Jon Small's report, which was delivered to the AGM at 31, Hazelwood Road, on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> April, just too late for the last newsletter.

Jon started by thanking everyone for attending "it's good to see you all." He remarked that he really appreciates the feeling of community that we have here that you don't get in other places.

He then reviewed the events of the past year, including:

- We have a new member – Joanne McGeehan, who has already taken two services.
- We have a new noticeboard and a re-vamped website.
- The committee has decided that we are staying in our present premises for the meantime, so we will be making some improvements in the near future, hopefully including a toilet on the ground floor.
- We have had more than our usual number of guest worship leaders: Rev. Peter Hewis, Mrs. Alison Thursfield, Rev. Don Phillips, Mrs. Dorothy Haughton, Miss Winnie Gordon and Mr. Sandy Ellis (all from various Midland Unitarian Association congregations) and also Rev George Sarmezey, Rev. Bill Simons and Mrs. Joyce Ashworth (General Assembly President)
- Our custom of doing "something different" on 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays has continued sporadically – on 31<sup>st</sup> August, we held our customary Walk in the Park in Abington Park, to which we welcomed visitors from Leicester Unitarian Fellowship. It coincided with the annual Umbrella Fair – an annual 'green' fair. After the walk, we got involved with a demonstration by the Secular Society outside Abington Museum, which was protesting about censorship of an exhibition about Darwin in the Museum. On 29<sup>th</sup> March,

five of us visited Banbury Unitarian Fellowship, and met some old friends.

- The Discussion Group has continued to meet once a month. Jon asked for ideas for thought-provoking topics.

Jon concluded by saying that "**deeds speak louder than words**" and asked those present to consider how we, Northampton Unitarians, could make a difference to our society.

## Calendar for July – September 2009

### July

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> Discussion Group 7.00 pm. Topic: *Why does G-d let bad things happen?*

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> Worship service, led by Jon Small

### August

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> No Discussion Group meeting this month

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> Congregational Service: theme: *the connection between Beauty and Spirituality*

Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> A Walk in the Park – see page 10 for details

### September

Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> Discussion Group 7.00 pm. Topic: *How free-range is Unitarianism?*

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> Worship service, led by Mark Beaumont

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Service, led by Jon Small

*All worship services are held at  
31, Hazelwood Road, and start at 10.30 am*

*Visitors are most welcome!*

## Northampton Expects ... The Newbie Boldly Goes: General Assembly 2009 Report

First Fig – Edna St. Vincent Millay

*My candle burns at both ends;  
It will not last the night;  
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends –  
It gives a lovely light!*

My first GA, what can I say? It was inspiring, overwhelming but great fun too. I had been told that exhaustion was a real possibility, nay, probability, and indeed, as prophesied, so it was! Sue – thank-you for the warning!

So, what was it about a few days in Chester that could have caused such a state? Well, with a packed GA schedule combined with the eagerness of the first-timer to experience everything, it was perhaps inevitable. I was quite determined to attend all the early morning worship sessions (7.30a.m start) and I did achieve this despite the allure of relaxing in the amazingly well-priced Student Union bar until the wee hours, well, maybe close to the witching hour anyway! I do think that Cliff Reed might help us first-timers out here perhaps, with a variation on his Unitarian classic ‘Sleep – What’s That?’

I loved the evening worship too, the opening ceremony and anniversary service especially. I thought perhaps, being a newcomer was the reason for my attitude of looking for the positive in what I heard and saw and that critique was natural for seasoned veterans. I didn’t expect that Unitarian principles of diversity and tolerance would promote the negativity I encountered on occasions regarding any and every aspect of the

GA. I wondered why did some people feel the need to criticise so much, when there was so much to applaud in people’s motives and intentions? Not that critique isn’t important.

Clearly, the venue and catering were souring the mood for many, with much wistfulness for the superior venue of 2008, Hatfield. Some clearly had reason to be upset with blocked drains and other serious grievances. But the near constant whinging at meal-times I found quite draining. I am sad to confess some disappointment in my fellow Unitarians. Yes, it was poor service but we are blessed to be able to be here, aren’t we? So my humble prayer is ‘let’s make the best of it!’

This attitude extended to the EC who seemed to be targets for ire with a piece in the co-incidental publication of The Inquirer and comments in the GA Zette. The focus seemed less on the issues and more on needless personal attacks. Indeed, someone commented to me that the Zette was a puppy compared to formerly and they were missing a more scurrilous publication. I thought, if there’s corruption, fine, but, if not, you want scurrilous for the sake of it? Joyce Ashworth, the retiring President, who, with her easy grace and warmth was a joy to listen to, was also disappointed with the negative atmosphere and mentioned it in her speech, although she was attacked for this too as abuse of privilege and platform!

Anyway, back to the positive, I say! I particularly enjoyed all the singing and attended the hymn workshop where there were many hearty voices singing from the new and very purple hymnbook, a copy of which I brought back. I didn’t have the confidence to present myself as a choir candidate but, perhaps if I go next year, I will, as I now know there are no auditions!

Sue very kindly looked out for me over the time at Chester as I had been apprehensive beforehand but I’m glad to say with some,

hopefully justified confidence, that I negotiated my own way quite often after settling in. However, I was always glad to see her familiar smile in the Molloy Hall or at meal-times, although I do know a few MU faces now, which really helped me feel less isolated. Sue also introduced me to dozens of people, including the wonderfully funny and down-to-earth Shammy. Thank-you Sue for all your care and guidance at Chester as well as driving there and back.

The business meetings were more amusing than I'd expected with some great debates and some serious heckling, (particularly with regard to the PA system or human error in the use thereof!). Sadly the increasing stuffiness of the Molloy Hall, was not proving conducive to firing up the grey matter requisite for these slots, at least for me!

The Growth Day was another positive with Jane Dwinell's spot on growing congregations really well received. She seemed to have the power of defying the stuffiness of the Molloy Hall and generated some much needed inspiration and energy amongst those present. For most, this energy lasted into the workshops, and although the one that I attended was productive, the mood, unfortunately, was rather flat.

The book stall was full of goodies but with a budget I decided to go minimal and just purchased Stephen Lingwood's book, 'The Unitarian Life', as recommended by Sue. I have found this a wonderful book to dip into – it is an anthology of pieces by Unitarians on diverse aspects of life. It has come in useful already as I have selected a prayer by Alistair Bates from it for my 'This Airy Cathedral' service.

I can truthfully say I enjoyed almost everything the GA had to offer, (bar the moaning!) and even when I wasn't, I was still learning (perhaps, especially, not to put my fellow Unitarians on

the pedestal of perfect courtesy at meal-times!). It was great to hear, and see, in some cases, with presentations from several congregations, what others were doing – much inspiration to take back to Northampton, both for services and, hopefully, for growth, in depth and breadth.

The theme for 2010 is 'Youth' and should it prove welcome, I believe I should be happy to be a delegate for Northampton again. Many, many thanks to the committee – for nominating and sponsoring me to go to GA 2009 and providing the opportunity to learn so much.

**Joanne McGeehan**

**Joanne and Sue at the GA meetings** *(photo by Shammy Webster)*



## The Lighter Side

This "quacked" me up!!



### The Bathtub Test

During a visit to the mental asylum, a visitor asked the Director how do you determine whether or not a patient should be institutionalized.

'Well,' said the Director, 'we fill up a bathtub, then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup and a bucket to the patient and ask him or her to empty the bathtub.'

'Oh, I understand,' said the visitor. 'A normal person would use the bucket because it's bigger than the spoon or the teacup.'

'No' said the Director, 'A normal person would pull the plug. Do you want a bed near the window?'

## Forthcoming Events

### Congregational Service



Our Summer congregational service this year is on the theme of **the connection between Beauty and Spirituality**, and will be taking place on **Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> August** at 31, Hazelwood Road, at 10.30 a.m. Please bring along a reading, a prayer, a poem, or just your thoughts on the subject.



### A Walk in the Park



We will be doing our traditional Walk in the Park on **Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> August**, meeting at Abington Park at 10.30, opposite the entrance to the Museum. After a stroll in the (hopefully) sunshine, we will adjourn to the café for refreshments. Bring your family along and relax in the company of fellow Unitarians.

## Forthcoming Events

### Northampton Unitarians 182<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary Service

**When:** Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2009

**Where:** 31, Hazelwood Road, Northampton

**Led by:** Mr. Jon Small, Chairman

We cordially invite everyone to attend this joyous occasion. We will be having coffee / tea and cakes afterwards.

### Midland Unitarian Association of Lay Preachers And Service Leaders Autumn Training

**Topic:** Prayer & Meditation

**Led by:** Rev. Ant. Howe

**When:** Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2009

**Where:** Kingswood Meeting House, Packhorse Lane,  
Hollywood, Worcs B47 5DQ

**Time:** 10.00 am – 4.15 pm (coffee/tea available from 9.30 am)

*Further details from Sue Woolley (see p.12)*

### Midland Unitarian Association Annual Lunch

**When:** Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2009

**Where:** Kingswood Meeting House, Packhorse Lane,  
Hollywood, Worcs B47 5DQ

**Time:**

**Guest Speaker:** Rev. Bob Wightman, President of the General  
Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches

*Further details from Sue Woolley (see p.12)*

### Northampton Interfaith Week

**When:** 15<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> November 2009

*Further information nearer the time*



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### Peace in the Summertime by Rev. Cliff Reed

God of Summer, whose gifts are sunshine to brighten our lives, and storms to keep them green, we turn to you in gratitude for this season.

Help us to relax and make the most of its warmth and beauty; to store away the memories of summer that help sustain us through winters yet to come.

We are grateful for times and places to enjoy ourselves – parks and gardens, beaches and swimming pools, mountains and woodlands – whether we seek peace and solitude or good company and noisier pursuits!

Help us to let go of our frantic busy-ness and find peace in the summertime. Amen.