



Northampton Unitarians News

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

Issue 29, April – June 2010

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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 Rev. Cliff Reed.

Northampton's Annual General Meeting

A select few of us gathered after the good congregational service on Spring (see report on page 5), to hold our Annual General Meeting. Chairman Jon Small reviewed the highlights of the past year, including a splendid alternative service led by Rowan & Willow Songsmith in March, September's Anniversary Service about Sir Philip Manfield led by himself and a very interesting Saturday school led by Fiona Boyle. Some refurbishment of the building and gardens has taken place, including a brand new ground floor toilet. In any other business, it was agreed that we should change the way we buy refreshments, that there should be slight changes in our customary order of service and that the Meditation Group should be revived. Watch this space

Below is an extract from Jon's report:

"Another event perhaps as significant as Fiona's Saturday School – also triggered by Fiona is the visit that, on Fiona's instigation, she and I made last week to the Newington Green and Islington Unitarian Church. The minister, Andy Pakula, is from the United States where he began his ministerial training, completing it when he moved here. It seems that largely due to his dynamic leadership the congregation there has grown prodigiously over the last few years. We witnessed a service attended by 36 people – some old, but a surprising number of young, largely female participants. And I use that word advisedly as the congregation *did* participate, not only with a couple of readings &c, but those that wished coming forward and speaking to everyone of their concerns and joys.

Unitarianism is a faith that should be at the forefront of spiritual endeavour today we are *so* up to date with our Freedom Reason and Tolerance that spiritual seekers - young people in particular - *should* be flocking to join us in our dialogue and quest. We have to give them what they want – we *must* adapt to today!

Many here will know Ant Howe, minister of Kingswood congregation – another dynamic leader. Ant and Andy have cooperated in an article in the March 20th *Inquirer* entitled "Seven Steps to Growth". I feel that this is such an important development in Unitarian history that I have printed off the "Clip 'n' save" "Guide to Growth" for those who would like to read it and don't subscribe to the magazine. These guys talk so much sense and I would like for us to use this material as a blueprint for our next year's effort. I know some of what we may do may not appeal to all, but looking at the longer picture if we want this congregation to survive then it has to grow and both Ant and Andy have already done just that – the proof is in the pudding! We have to get away from "Orthodox Unitarianism" and start giving what people today want and need! I'll be looking for ideas from everyone, or anyone!

We look forward in 2010 to an improved Meeting House and a challenging programme of services, discussions and Saturday schools. If we can make our congregation grow half as well as Ant and Andy's congregations have then we better start looking for larger premises or consider knocking out this wall!"



An example of Marie Field's beautiful flower arrangements, which grace our Worship Room at every service
(photo Jon Small)

Calendar for April to June 2010

April

- Tuesday 6th Discussion Group 7.00 pm. Topic: *The Many Faces Of God*
Sunday 11th Worship service, led by Jon Small
Sunday 25th Worship service, led by Joanne McGeehan

May

- Tuesday 4th Discussion Group 7.00 pm. Topic: *Does the Supernatural Exist?*
Sunday 9th Worship service, led by Mark Beaumont
Sunday 23rd Worship service, led by Fiona Boyle (Whitsun)

June

- Tuesday 1st Discussion Group 7.00 pm. Topic: *How We See Others: Perspectives and Prejudices*
Sunday 13th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley
Sunday 28th Congregational Service. Theme: Summer Solstice: Summer is Here!

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

Visitors are most welcome!

Springtime Congregational Service

Our AGM was preceded by an inspiring Congregational Service. It never ceases to amaze me how much in tune we are with each other spiritually, which results in some lovely contributory services. The proceedings would have started with an extract from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons: Spring*, brought by Frank and Marie Field, but our music system decided to be temperamental.

The chalice lighting words on the Spring equinox were chosen and read by Joanne McGeehan, who also shared a poem by Gerald Manley Hopkins, with a spring theme.

Sue Woolley contributed a reading from Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* and a reflection on anticipating Spring by Terasa Cooley.

Brian Watson chose a hymn from the Purple Book, which had the lovely refrain "Love is come again like wheat that springeth green." This was followed by a piece by his wife Julia, who was unfortunately not able to be with us. It was a meditation that suggested that the healing of evil could be accomplished by the love of individuals.

Jon Small read a couple of poems; one by the immortal Spike Milligan, and the second, written by Jon himself, which was a lovely meditation on the various stages that a seed goes through, from being dormant, then germinating and growing, then flowering and seeding again in turn.

Frank Field contributed a poem by Robert Frost *A Prayer in Spring*.

Our organist Mark Beaumont had chosen the other three hymns, all with a springtime /renewal theme, including one by a past-President of the MUA who is well known to some of us, Barbara Russell. He also spoke about a child's crystal garden kit – how the crystals seemed to behave as if they were alive. He said there is a life force *chi* which is the essence of everything that lives and grows. Spring is an opportunity to celebrate this. He then played us a piece by the French Baroque composer, Raison.

Our blessing, contributed by Joanne, was based on a poem for renewal, hope and promise in the Spring.

MUA Training Day on Alternative Worship

17 delegates from nine congregations (including Leicester Unitarian Fellowship and Mansfield) attended a training day on Alternative Worship, led by Sue Woolley and Alison Thursfield. After some preliminary words about using ritual in ordinary services, and putting together completely alternative services, the delegates were split up into three groups, and given an occasion each to make up a 15-minute ritual about. The themes were One World Week, Mothering Sunday and the Summer Solstice, and the ingenuity shown by people was amazing. It was clear that the delegates very much enjoyed the group work, and after lunch, we got back together, and each group presented its ritual to the rest. Then our guest speakers, Mel Prideaux and Linda King, who had come all the way from Yorkshire, talked to us about walking a labyrinth. We then de-camped to the Heaviside Hall (probably the largest flat space in any MUA church) to walk the labyrinth itself, which is seven metres square! Most people enjoyed it, but a couple had literal and metaphorical cold feet. Then it was time to brave the vagaries of Coventry's ring road, and go our separate ways. **Sue Woolley**



Walking the labyrinth in the Heaviside Hall in Coventry (photo SW)

MUA Annual General Meeting: March 2010

A bright day dawned for the 144th AGM, although the first under its new, shortened moniker, Midland Unitarian Association. 43 attendees were expected and 39 duly came, with an extra on the day, representing 14 out of 18 congregations – figures virtually unchanged from 2009. Angela Maher and Winnie Gordon were already on site as Sue Woolley, (with her MUA Secretary hat on), and I arrived, and, sadly, the Unitarian New Meeting alarm decided to challenge their patience by resisting all attempts to be put to bed. Hopeful the engineer would soon arrive, we got on with preparations, including setting the refreshments out in the main room as the alarm noise was very challenging indeed in the kitchen area!

With the engineer not yet in view, we all clung to our best Unitarian tolerance and began with the opening devotions from Sue, with selections from Deuteronomy and Helen Steiner Rice. After holding silence together for those Unitarians who had passed away during the year, Sue presented the Annual Report, referencing highlights of the year, including 3 training days, the MUA Annual Lunch, the Asparagus Lunch, several new websites, several well supported editions of *MU Now* and the updated version of *The ABC of Lay Preaching*. She commented on how much she had enjoyed her 2nd year as District Facilitator.

The accounts were then presented by the Treasurer, Sandy Ellis, after which Angela Maher proposed a vote of thanks to the officers of the MUA Executive. All officers were then re-elected unopposed with the committee being refreshed with 3 new members. Honoraria were then discussed and a proposal to link increases to the Minister's stipend was agreed as recommended by the MUA Executive Committee. There followed a few items of AOB, including the date of the Annual Garden Party, Saturday, 14th August 2010, at Kingswood Meeting House.

The Midland Unitarian Lay Preachers' Association then had their AGM in the Worship Area, whilst the other delegates networked

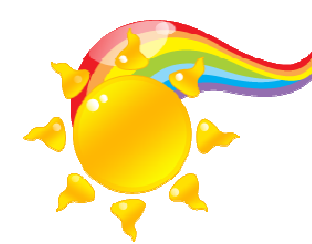
in the Hall before Peter Hewis, President, announced that the Agenda would be brought forward by half an hour thereby allowing everyone to begin the Bring'n'Share Lunch, which was really well supported by both savoury and sweet options, including a delicious home-made trifle!

Peter then delivered a lovely service on "What Is Happiness?" which included music from Bryn Terfel singing Eli Jenkins' Prayer from Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood*. Then Andy Pakula from Newington Green and Islington, London delivered a presentation on "It's Not About Us". This followed on from his recent article with Ant Howe of Kingswood, in *The Inquirer*, on growth and how to generate it, with some more specific detail that will also appear in an upcoming edition of *The Inquirer*. He said that, "Unitarianism is a religion in motion". His key message was of "letting go", both to our congregations and, also, in terms of leadership. If we "give it away" we really could fly high together. In order to begin this, we need to focus on right purpose, which should comprise inclusion, acceptance and nurturance, rather than preservation and protectionism. We also need to better manage the balance between control and freedom, moving closer to the latter pole rather the former, as currently. We could take as inspiration the evangelical model of the "permission giving Church" whose goals are, firstly, to encourage initiative and, secondly, to channel energies. He then presented his vision of how this could be delivered in within a quality framework. He envisioned a four step scheme, bronze, silver, gold and platinum, which could lead congregations in the right direction. He then opened the floor to questions of which there were several, and all of which revealed the level of stimulation that his talk had provoked. Indeed, UNM was buzzing with talk afterwards, not the least of which was people already discussing how they could implement some of his ideas! So, I think we all left on a high, with a little bit of Pakula inspiration in our hearts to take back to our congregations.

Joanne McGeehan

Forthcoming Events

Congregational Service



Our Summer congregational service this year is appropriate to the season, having the theme of **Summer Solstice: Summer is Here!**, and will be taking place on **Sunday 27th June 2010** 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. And remember to let Mark Beaumont, our organist, know which hymn you would like to sing!



Meditation Group

We are planning to re-launch our Meditation Group in the next few months. Ted Bray, of the Theosophical Society, has indicated his willingness to lead some sessions for us. Your committee will be discussing the whens and hows soon, and we will be re-launching the Group with a splash of publicity!

Forthcoming Events

**Midland Unitarian Association of Lay Preachers
And Service Leaders
Worship Studies Course Foundation Step**

Learn the nuts and bolts of leading worship

Led by: Mrs. Sue Woolley and Guest Speakers

When: Saturday 22nd May, 12th June, 10th July 2010

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

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

Cost: £29 to MUA delegates / £38 to others

(this includes a £5 registration fee & a FREE copy of the MUA's
updated publication *The ABC of Lay Preaching*)

Further details from Sue Woolley (see p.12)



**General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches
Annual Meetings**

When: 8th – 11th April 2010

Where: Nottingham University, Jubilee Campus

Northampton Unitarians are sending a delegate; her report will be
published in the next issue.



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“flowers of a thousand colours” by Ishpriya R.S.C.J.

O Holy One, I ran through the fields and gathered flowers of a
thousand colours –

And now I pour them out at Your feet.

Their beauty and their brightness shout for joy in Your Presence.

You created the flowers of the fields and made each one far more
lovely

Than all the skill of man could design.

Accept my joy along with theirs,

This field of blossoms at Your feet.

Holy One

As the wind blows through these flowers

Till they dance in the ecstasy of creation,

Send Your Spirit to blow through my being

Till I too bloom and dance with the fullness of Your life.