



Northampton Unitarians News

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

Issue 35, January – March 2012

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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.

Friend: A Story

She felt terrible; she had to get out of the house.

“I’ll go up Avalon Hill – it’s quiet up there, I’ll go in the wood on top and try to get a grip on myself.”

As she made her way there, a short distance from her home (“Ha! - *Home*” she thought) she relived the awful events that had broken her heart.

As she made her way up the gentle, but gradually steepening slope of the hill some of the anguish she felt lessened. The wind in the trees, distant birds calling to each other and the muted sounds of the town below made her feel better. The clouds parted and the sun began to warm her back only to add to the comfort she felt.

This disappeared once she had entered the brooding shadows of the small wood at the summit and when she reached the clearing in the centre on the summit she sat on one of the logs placed there as seats and began to reflect on the recent events.

“Oh God!” she thought, “if only it hadn’t happened – what *can* I do?”

“*Please* God help me! Our Father which art in heaven.” “I don’t usually pray, but Father God what do I do?”

She thought of God – an ancient, bearded man in a long white robe sitting on a throne in the clouds and dismissed this at once as a childish image.

“If there is a Father God then I suppose he’d be something like my Dad – oh! I *wish* he was still alive – he’d know what to do.”

She thought of her father and imagined a God like him. She remembered when she was little and was upset or hurt she’d run to him and climb on his lap and he would hug her or stroke her hair and say quiet things to her, or just *be* and say or do nothing at all. He always knew exactly what to do. And she felt *safe*! Being thrown up in the sunlight squealing and caught by those great, strong hands. A Father God like that could be trusted and relied on and would always put things right. And any questions she had

about the great, big world she found herself born into Dad could always be relied to give a good answer to.

“Father God must be like that.” She thought. “My idea of God is someone who is firm and strong and loves me.” The thoughts made her feel a little better and she smiled as she looked at the shafts of golden light shining through the trees onto the bracken below.

.oOo.

Whenever he felt bad – unhappy – had a problem: he would go for a walk. Well this time he didn’t feel unhappy, he felt *devastated*, he still couldn’t believe what had happened to him, but he still went walking.

“Perhaps I’ll walk for ever and not come back.” He thought, “Perhaps I’ll just walk away and start up somewhere else!”

He knew this wasn’t practical; he would just have to go back sometime and see it through, but a walk couldn’t hurt.

He wandered through the park past adults and children smiling and generally enjoying themselves, further on he came to an area with seats and contemplated the idea of sitting and having a good think, but the relative peace of the rose-garden was quickly shattered by a group of youths who invaded the space accompanied by the intrusive din of reggae-beat.

Disgusted, he rose and walked out of the park. Over to his left was the rising green bulk of Avalon Hill.

“I know, I’ll go up there, few people bother these days and I should get some peace.”

By the time he arrived at the little gate that gave access to people and stopped bikes he was hot and breathless, he removed his jacket and slung it over his shoulder. There was a form just inside the gate by the notice-board so he sat down. Once he had caught his breath he decided to climb the hill.

“I should be alright as long as I take it easy.” He thought.

A few yards from the summit, tired out again he sat on the grassy slope and regarded the town below.

“Mother of God – I’m knackered,” he thought, “I’m definitely not in as good a condition as I used to be.”

“This used to be a prehistoric religious site, it’s all on that board down there where I came in – I wonder if they worshipped a Mother of God – no, they would have worshipped a Mother God. I reckon God ought to be a woman – a mother.” A spear of anguish went through him as he remembered his mother. “Yes, I think I could believe in a Mother God. I remember my Mum, how she was always there for me, when I was a kid and I fell over she’d be there, the hugs and the kisses when she tucked me up in bed.”

He got up and walked up to the top of the hill, onto the flat area where there was a clearing. Lifting up his head he shouted, “Oh, Mother God – Great Mother! Come to me in my hour of need, show me what to do!”

He felt a bit silly doing this, but he thought it was probably what those ancient Pagans might have done and he felt if God was to help him it would be in a female form.

He felt even sillier when he caught a movement out of the corner of his eye. Someone he hadn’t seen was sitting on a log at the edge of the clearing, a woman, and when he shouted she’d lifted her head in surprise and was now staring at him.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t see you there, I hope I didn’t frighten you – I don’t normally go around shouting at the sky, but I’m in such a mess I thought I’d come up here to be alone and try to work out what to do about it all. I didn’t even plan to call on God, let alone the Great Mother or whatever it’s called.”

“It’s ok,” she replied, “I’m in a fix myself and that’s why I came up here and funny enough I’ve been silently praying to the Father God. I see God as being like my Dad, big, strong, protective, but occasionally strict – I wish he was alive now he’d have helped me.”

“That is odd because I was thinking of God as being like my Mum, kind, caring, compassionate – nurturing I suppose I mean.”

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He sat on the log beside her and they told each other of their troubles. We do not to know what they were only that in the telling things began to be less troublesome and that the two found that they could arrive at an agreement as to their concept of God; both male and female. Father/Mother God became one. Through their discussion that went on for much longer than they realised until they reached to town again they found solutions to their problems that they together could solve.

.oOo.

“You know, we both appealed to God up there on the hill and He/She- It gave us, through ourselves solutions to most of them, if not relief. We can’t go on calling God He or She and It sounds too impersonal, so what’s it to be?”

“I know, she replied. Instead of Father God or Mother God – or It I’m going to call God; ‘Friend’ – ‘Oh God my Friend’ when next I pray.

“I like that.” he said.

Jon Small



Calendar for January – March 2012

January

Sunday 8th Worship service, led by Mark Beaumont

Sunday 22nd Worship service, led by Julia Watson

February

Sunday 12th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

Sunday 26th Worship service, led by Rowan & Willow
Songsmith

March

Sunday 11th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

Sunday 25th Worship service, led by Jon Small, followed by our
Annual General Meeting

**It is very important that as many people as possible come to the
AGM this year – please put the date in your diary now**

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

Karen Armstrong and the Core of Religion

A goodly number of Unitarians were among the capacity audience at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue on 7th December to hear Karen Armstrong deliver the annual Younghusband Lecture of the World Congress of Faiths.

Karen spoke for an hour, entirely without notes, sharing her passionate belief in the sovereign importance of compassion as a force for good in the world. I believe that the message of the Charter for Compassion is one that all Unitarians should heed. Imagine what the world would be like if everyone followed it! If every person genuinely tried to behave to the rest of humankind with a concern and care for how they would feel. As it says in the

Charter for Compassion “Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creature, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.” By following it, Unitarians could make a difference in the world.

[The full report of this event will be appearing in our national newspaper, *The Inquirer*]



The Shadow Side of Christmas: a blogpost

So Christmas is a time of joy, of goodwill, of charitable thoughts and deeds. God's in his heaven; all's right with the world. Or is it? No, of course it's not. Many people I know are the lucky ones - we all have family and friends who love and care for us, with whom we can share the joys of the season. But not everyone is so fortunate. Christmas has a darker, largely unacknowledged side. Unaccustomed proximity can lead to bitter family arguments and breakdowns in relationships. And there are also so many lonely people who simply don't have anyone to share Christmas with, and who wouldn't feel like celebrating even if they did. For such people, the contrast between their lives and the Christmas projected through the media can exacerbate feelings of isolation, panic, stress and depression. For them, Christmas is a season to be got through somehow, not a time of joy and sharing. And even people who are spending time with friends or family may feel pressured to appear happy and to hide their true feelings or problems so as not to spoil the party atmosphere.

There is one particular charity, not as high profile as many, which exists to help such people. Its mission is (and I quote) "to provide confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing

feelings of distress or despair, including those who may lead to suicide." It is the Samaritans.

Most of us will be familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan, as told by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. A man lay wounded and dying by the roadside. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side of the road, not wanting to get involved. But the Samaritan was different. Although he was a stranger in those parts, he did not hesitate. He went across to the man, gave him water and bound up his wounds. Then he put him onto his own donkey and took him to the nearest inn, and left money for his care. When Jesus told that story, he asked which man had been the wounded man's neighbour, and was told "He that showed mercy on him."



Gezicht van barmhertigen Samaritan.
Die Samaritan die wonden, met hem hielen, en hem op den donkey, zamen: die priester, ginge op den anderen, en die Levite, en ginge ook op.
De heer. Mat. 25: 11-13.

The Samaritans was founded in November 1953, by an Anglican priest named Chad Varah. Eighteen years before, his first act as a young minister had been to bury a 14-year old girl who had killed herself when her periods started, because she thought she had some dreadful disease. Varah never forgot this girl and, in his own words, seized "every opportunity to teach young people about sex, and finding that it led youngsters to join my youth clubs and young couples to come for marriage preparation, and couples drifting apart to seek marriage guidance before it was invented." He was labelled a dirty old man for his troubles, but carried on

with his work regardless. People got in touch with him to talk through their problems, and he was delighted to help.

Then one day he read in a digest that there were three suicides a day in Greater London. To use his own words again: "What were they supposed to do if they didn't want a Doctor or Social Worker from our splendid Welfare State? What sort of a someone might they want? Well, some had chosen me, because of my liberal views. If it was so easy to save lives, why didn't I do it all the time? How, I answered myself, and live on what? And how would they get in touch at the moment of crisis? He concluded that he simply didn't have the time and that "it'd need a priest with one of those city churches with no parishioners" to do the job.

A short while later, he was offered the benefice of St Stephen Walbrook in the heart of the City of London, a church endowed by the Worshipful Company of Grocers. He told them of his idea of setting up a helpline for suicidal people, and the Samaritans was born.

The rest is history. There are now 202 branches of the Samaritans in the United Kingdom, and in 1974, Varah founded Befrienders International, the worldwide body of Samaritans branches. The basic principles have remained the same - Samaritans volunteers are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to offer that unique befriending service, and to provide confidential emotional support to anyone experiencing emotional distress or despair. In 2010 in the UK alone, Samaritans received nearly five million contacts, 85% of which were by phone, many of whom felt suicidal at the time of the call. They are dealt with by a total of 18,700 volunteers, who between them give nearly three million hours of their time to befriend people in need of emotional support. I think they are splendid. **SW**

Regional Events

Midland Unitarian Association of Lay Preachers And Service Leaders: Spring Training: Namings

Led by: Rev. Lynne Readett, Merseyside District Minister

When: Saturday 10th March 2012

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: Free to MUA delegates



Midland Unitarian Association Annual General Meeting

When: Saturday 31st March 2012

Where: Warwick Unitarian Chapel, High Street
Warwick CV34 4AX

Time: 10.30 am for 11.00 am

Guest Speaker: Rev. Dr. Ann Peart, President of the
General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches

Please bring your own lunch; refreshments provided by the
Warwick congregation

More details about these events from Sue Woolley (see p.12)

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A Wish by Max Coots

For you, I wish:

Soft snow,

A gift, both given and received, wrapped in love,

A candle and a fire,

A bowl of crisp, red apples, tangerines and oily oranges,

A blizzard of cards that bring those others closer than they were
before,

A tree that somehow kept its green when autumn came and went,
The joy of old stories that seem forever new and songs sung softly
under the breath of “peace on earth”.

