

Calendar JANUARY

SUNDAY 25th 11.00 am Morning Service with GA President Joyce Ashworth. Agape Meal following the service.
Stewards: Bryan Wood and Alan Barker

FEBRUARY

SUNDAY 1st 11.00 am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Stewards: Graham White and Josie Whiteley

Wednesday 4th 6.30 pm Meditation Service and Discussion Group

SUNDAY 8th 11.00 am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Stewards: Winnie Gordon and Dolly Gordon

Wednesday 11th 6.30 pm Meditation Service and Discussion Group

SUNDAY 15th 11.00 am Service of Welcoming and Rededication with Rev. Simon Ramsay. Agape Meal following the service

Stewards: Owen Beale and Cheryl Ford

Wednesday 18th 6.30 pm Meditation Service
7.30 pm Spiritual Movie Club

SUNDAY 22nd 11.00 am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay.
Stewards: Angela Maher and David Jones

Wednesday 25th 6.30 pm Meditation Service and Discussion Group

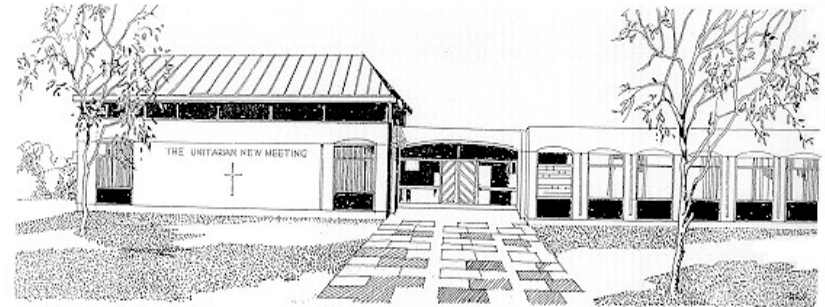
MARCH

SUNDAY 1st 11.00 am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Stewards: Alan Barker and Josie Whiteley



Unitarian New Meeting Church

Birmingham



February 2009

*When things go wrong as they sometimes will
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill
When the funds are low and the debts are high
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh
When care is pressing you down a bit
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.*

Often I think that the life in the church, for many, can seem more like slog than spirituality. This is primarily, in my opinion, to do with the size of congregation we are. Many people walk through our doors and warmly receive our open minded approach to religion. They get enthused and quite naturally want to do all they can to make UNM available to others like themselves, often through elaborate schemes. But:

Life is queer, with its twists and turns

*As every one of us sometimes learns
And many a failure turns about
When we might have won had we stuck it out
Don't give up though the pace seems slow
You may succeed with another blow.*

Grand schemes seem to be the order of the day: to get people in, to serve the community and to make a difference. I'm sure that in time this will all come, but **what is desperately needed at present are people that can commit to simple tasks** such as attending on Sundays, signing up to make coffee and to arrange the flowers for the Sunday service. These may seem like unimportant aspects of church life but I feel that if we cannot get these basic things right we have little hope of fulfilling grander aspirations. Most often:

*Success is failure turned inside out
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt
And you never can tell how close you are
It may be near when it seems so far
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.*

When we draw close to one another, work together and dream together there is nothing that is beyond our reach. Each of us is at liberty to create a sacred space that we would like to have in our own lives and also have the added benefit of then being able to offer the love, intimacy and support to those fellow humans who are also looking for a spiritual home. We have proved to ourselves with the Christmas Fayre that we are capable of making a difference to people's lives. So let us capitalise on the strengths and skills that we found in this endeavour so we can share our living and loving community with other kindred spirits across Birmingham.

Simon Ramsay

Forthcoming Events

Sunday 8th February Ministry committee meeting following the service.

Sunday 15th February Service of Welcoming and Rededication. Agape Meal following.

Sunday 1st March Vestry committee meeting following the service.

Saturday 7th March Singers are wanted to participate in recording a CD to support the new hymnbook 'Sing Your Faith' at Cross St Chapel, Manchester 10.30 am to 4.30 pm. Contact David Dawson for additional details, tel (01943) 608354

Saturday 21st March Midland Union AGM at The Great Meeting House, Coventry, 10.30 am to 4.00 pm The guest speaker will be Rev. John Harley. Further details from Sue Woolley tel: (01604) 870746

Wednesday 15th to Saturday 18th April Meetings of the General Assembly, at University College Chester. For more information contact Rev. Simon Ramsay.

Wayside Pulpit

Bless us with freedom from mere tolerance, replacing it with a genuine respect and warm embrace of our differences.

Gene Robinson

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In accordance with convention, all unsigned articles are written by the Editor. Any views expressed by the Editor make no claim to represent the views of the Congregation, or any person other than herself.

Poetry Corner

*The soul selects her own society,
Then shuts the door;
On her divine majority
Obtrude no more.*

*Unmoved, she notes the chariot's pausing
At her low gate;
Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling
Upon her mat.*

*I've known her from an ample nation
Choose one;
Then close the valves of her attention
Like stone.*

Emily Dickinson

Mardi Gras in the Big Easy

The end of February sees the beginning of Lent, a time of abstinence and fasting in the liturgical year. In preparation Christians would traditionally use up all of the forbidden Lenten fruits – eggs, dairy products, and meat – on the day before Ash Wednesday when Lent begins. In British and Irish traditions, this day is called Shrove Tuesday, and is celebrated with all manner of pancakes, but in many other places it is synonymous with a Carnival called Mardi Gras, meaning Fat Tuesday. One of the biggest Mardi Gras carnivals takes place in New Orleans, Louisiana, which has a strong French Catholic tradition. Krewes – the organisations that man the parades – spend all year making floats which are paraded down Charles Street towards the Mississippi River and thousands line the route.

This year's Mardi Gras will be on February 24th, and is bound to be big in New Orleans. Although it is very much a secular rather than religious festival, it is still officially over at the stroke of midnight on the Tuesday night as the local police come out to clear Bourbon Street of revellers and many non-Catholic New Orleans residents take up the Lenten tradition of giving up a small luxury after Mardi Gras.

Laissez les bons temps rouler!

Message from the Chairman

At this time of year, with the cold weather and the short days and the fact that our festivities seem to have been a long time ago everything seems to me to be more difficult to achieve than at any other time of year. Tracy and Charles and I haven't even made it into Church since Christmas Day due to a combination of visiting family and colds, coughs and sneezes aplenty.

That seems to make the daily grind even harder because **I feel that coming to church allows us to put aside our own worries for a while and to share the welcome.** By saying hello to everyone we meet at church we can not only feel wanted but feel that others want to be part of something with us. And at a time of year when even just doing the daily chores is a grind then we all need all the help we can get!

The only one of our little family who seems unaffected by it all is the cat and that is mainly because she spends her time asleep on the bed at this time of year. But that too is misleading because she is at heart an outdoor cat who loves to spend most of the day and night in the garden when the weather is clement.

Perseverance is the key at this time of the year and one of the places we can find a little extra stamina with which to face the new week is at UNM. So let's be grateful for that extra bit of help - I know we are missing it at the moment and we all hope to be back with you soon - well before you get to read these words!

Owen Beale

Subscriptions

Please don't forget to return your subscription and (if you pay tax) gift aid forms for 2009. The church relies on the contributions of its members to meet the bills, so please give generously, it would be amazing if we could all pledge more money than we gave last year.

If you have misplaced your forms and would like another copy, there are plenty of spares in the vestry, speak to Simon who should be able to locate you one.

*extract from **The Single Secret to Making 2009 Your Best Year Ever***

...I made a small list of things I'd recommend to anyone wanting to make 2009 their best year ever ... coming up with a single life-changing goal, creating a mantra for that goal to keep them on track, simplifying their lives, making time for loved ones and themselves, learning to be in the moment ... all of these are great tips, and I could come up with a dozen more that would really help people if they wanted to make positive changes.

But then I realized that there's just one tip that's needed. And it's not a tip you'll read in most personal development, productivity or self-help blogs or books.

That's because if you implemented this one tip, you wouldn't really need any others. It would put all of us out of business.

So, because I enjoy writing personal development posts and books for you guys, I'm counting on you to NOT actually implement this, and to keep needing other tips I give you in the future.

Kidding of course! Go ahead, put me and all the rest of 'em out of business. I'd rather have you happy and successful, and look for another job, knowing that I did something good.

So what's that single secret, the one thing that will not only make 2009 your best year ever, but put personal development and self-help bloggers and authors out of business?

Are you sure you're ready to hear it?

OK, you're ready. :) Here goes:

Stop waiting for happiness. Happiness is right here, right now.

Sounds too simple, but if you haven't realized this, and put it into action, it can have an amazing effect on your life. Today. Right now.

...

Leo Babauta @ ZenHabits.com

The Flaming Chalice

Each Unitarian worship service I have attended has started with the lighting of the chalice, and ended with its extinguishing. I find this small ritual very helpful in bringing my mind to a quieter state, and then transitioning back out into the 'real world'. **But, I'm never quite sure what the chalice is supposed to symbolise.**

Well, when I looked into the history of the flaming chalice, it turns out that it started out as a logo for the work of the Unitarian Service Committee in World War II. Designed by Austrian refugee Hans Deutsch, it became a symbol of the underground assistance given by the committee to persecuted people in Nazi Europe. During and after the war it was popularised first in America, and then with other Unitarians, and eventually began to feature as an actual chalice lit in services – although no one seems to know when or where this practice first began.

As befits a faith without dogma or creed, there is no set interpretation of the chalice. Some trace its importance to the persecution of Czech reformer Jan Hus, who was burned as a heretic for allowing the laity to receive the communion chalice. Others liken it to lighting a flame of religious freedom – which always makes me think of the hymn that begins "O for that flame of living fire, which shone so strong in saints of old".

Whilst I like these interpretations, I'm also reminded that **light is really amazing stuff**. Whether it's the Greek story of Prometheus who discovered fire, the creation story of Genesis with God's command "Let there be light", and there was light, or Einstein's discovery that matter and energy are the same and that they are linked by the speed of light in the equation $E = mc^2$, making and using light has been fundamental to the human story.

Lighting a chalice is in the grand scheme of things, a tiny, tiny ritual but to me it's a really important and connecting one. It links in my mind magic, and religion, and science, and more important things like sharing, and truth, and reason, and I'm glad that there isn't an official meaning because I like to look at it in my own way, and I hope you do too.

Angela Maher