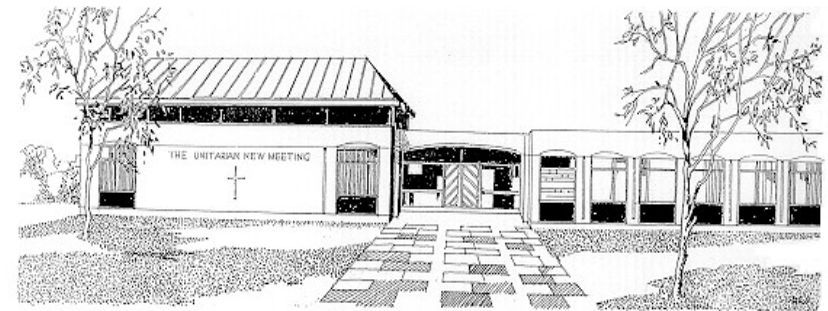


Calendar
APRIL

SUNDAY	5th	11.00 am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay <i>Stewards: Owen Beale and Cheryl Ford</i>
Wednesday	8th	6.30 pm Meditation Service and Discussion Group
SUNDAY	12th	11.00 am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay <i>Stewards: Alan Barker and Josie Whitely</i>
Wednesday	15th	6.30 pm Meditation Service and Spiritual Movie Club
SUNDAY	19th	11.00 am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay Agape Meal following the service <i>Stewards: Philip Crosskey and David Jones</i>
Wednesday	22nd	6.30 pm Meditation Service and Discussion Group
SUNDAY	26th	11.00 am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay <i>Stewards: Hazel Reynolds and Jill Hudson</i>
Wednesday	1st	6.30 pm Meditation Service and Discussion Group
MAY		
SUNDAY	3rd	11.00 am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay Agape Meal and AGM following the service:
Wednesday	8th	6.30 pm Meditation Service and Discussion Group
SUNDAY	10th	11.00 am Morning Service with Sue Woolley. Discussion on Publicity and Welcoming following.
Wednesday	15th	6.30 pm Meditation Service and Spiritual Movie Club
SUNDAY	17th	11.00 am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Wednesday	22nd	6.30 pm Meditation Service and Discussion Group
SUNDAY	24th	11.00 am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay.
Wednesday	27th	6.30 pm Meditation Service and Discussion Group
SUNDAY	31st	11.00 am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay with Candles of Joy and Concern.

Unitarian New Meeting Church

Birmingham



April 2009

Freedom is not worth having if it does not connote freedom to err. It passes my comprehension how human beings, be they ever so experienced and able, can delight in depriving other human beings of that precious right.

Mahatma Gandhi, 1931

Last month I went up to our wonderful centre at Hucklow for a conference on growing congregations. We (that is the group of ministers that attended) had the pleasure of the The Reverend Peter Morales, the senior minister of Jefferson Unitarian Church in Denver Colorado, leading this course.



His congregational situation is somewhat different from ours in that they have a regular attendance in excess of 850 every Sunday. I don't think that we are, in the immediate future at least, going to be this kind of Unitarian super church, but to expect reasonable growth, I think, is a reasonable expectation. I must say that I found this particular course to be one of the most inspiring things that I have attended since I have joined the Unitarian movement and certainly *the* most important course I have attended since becoming a Unitarian minister.

The course wasn't just filled with quick fix techniques as these simply do not work. There is simply no magic equation that will send people flooding through our doors although there are certain techniques that can be implemented. What the course did do was address the heart of the issues that we face. It addressed issues of collective vision and the whys and wherefores of us being there.

A point that resounded clearly within me was that in society there are distinct maladies of isolation, meaninglessness, belief in God but with no way to express or explore those beliefs and the complete lack of community. These maladies are serious and even life threatening so we have a duty, indeed a moral imperative, not only to come to our church to discern our own truth, but also to provide a space for people, outside of our community, to do the same. One of Peter Morales' lines on this responsibility was:

'Feeding the spiritually hungry and housing the religiously homeless'

There is no doubt whatsoever that I personally and we as a church have made mistakes and have not responded to this moral imperative with the necessary urgency. It is also true that as a congregation we are in a process; we will not be one type of congregation one day and something completely different the next. It takes time, it takes conscious planning and it takes us to work together for the greater good; as the Christmas Fayre showed us, we can make huge successes when we work together.

Whatever has happened in the past is in the past; both success and failure. I feel more of a sense of purpose than ever before and I would therefore humbly ask of you all to give as much as you can so we may share this most wonderful of religious approaches with a world that is so desperately in need of experiencing its unique vision.

Simon Ramsay

Forthcoming Events

Sunday 26th April Social Action Group discussion after the Morning Service.

Saturday 2nd May Workshop on Small Group Worship and Covenant Groups at Kingswood 10.00 am to 4.15 pm. Further details from Sue Woolley tel: (01604) 870746

Sunday 3rd May UNM Annual General Meeting following the Morning Service and Agape Meal.

Sunday 10th May Discussion on Publicity and Welcoming led by Sue Woolley, Midland Unitarian Association Facilitator after the Service.

Saturday 25th July to Saturday 1st August. Unitarian Experience Week at Great Hucklow. For more information contact Kathy Beckett, 13 Neilson Close, Chandlers Ford, Eastleigh, Hants SO53 1GR.

Saturday 15th to Saturday 22nd August. Hucklow Summer School. For more information, contact Mel Prideaux on (01924) 781020

Wayside Pulpit

If Easter says anything to us today, it says this: You can put truth in a grave, but it won't stay there. You can nail it to a cross, wrap it in winding sheets and shut it up in a tomb, but it will rise!

Clarence W. Hall

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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.

Social Action Group at UNM

I have felt for some time that there is **little satisfaction in being a member of a church, which although fulfilling my spiritual needs, does little to reach out to those in need in the local community.** It is personally agreeable to me to spend an hour on a Sunday morning attending a Service of Worship followed by some time socializing, but I feel something is lacking about this.

Being a small congregation with a high proportion of senior citizens and also a high proportion of people living a considerable distance from the church, it is perhaps unrealistic to set our sights too high, but I think we should follow Winnie and Bini's endeavour of the Christmas Fayre to engage in whatever way we can with people outside the church (as well as meeting the needs of those inside).

Simon recently spoke of the many people who come to see him each week who wish to engage in the church in a deeper way. We could offer activities either in an evening for specific small groups according to demand and our abilities or perhaps a Sunday afternoon event such as table tennis and tea, or a sing song and some board games for children.

I know we need to “grow” ourselves, but reaching out to people should encourage new members which would achieve that aim.

Perhaps they would love to make coffee or arrange flowers! People from all walks of life have needs, both spiritual and for support, friendship and practical help, not just the poor and deprived and we should endeavour to reach anyone who would like to attend our activities.

A meeting will be held after the service on Sunday 26th April and anyone interested is warmly invited to attend to discuss setting up a Social Action Group.

Jill Hudson

GA Motions

The motions for the General Assembly can be found online at the following url: http://www.unitarian.org.uk/2009_agm_motions.htm . This year's delegates are Winnie Gordon and Angela Maher, if you have any comments to make on the motions, please direct them to the delegates or any Vestry Committee member. The GA starts on 15th April 2009.

Message from the Chairman

Hello everyone. Here we are heading towards Spring. As I write this the season has just started but by the time you read my words it will be well under way. I have to say that it is my favourite time of year because we have so much to look forward to and the first signs of Spring are my favourites, seeing the snowdrops and crocuses come into bloom, finding the catkins coming out and the first thorn blossom. It is only when the evenings become lighter and we get towards the time when the clocks change that I realise how much the winter months seem to weigh upon me. **It always makes me think how it is only when a burden is lifted from us that can actually appreciate how heavy it was.**

Sometimes the lifting of a burden like this also represents the loss of something or someone very dear to us but on whom we had had to spend a great deal of time, effort and care. There can be a feeling of guilt when we realise that we can relax from the hard work, at least until the next call on our time comes along. I don't think that we should feel guilty at relaxing from our efforts. It is not the same thing as wishing that the source of our worries was gone by any means.

There has to be time for everyone to actually enjoy simply being alive and Spring seems to me to be the very best time to do just that! There is something so heartening in realising that behind the gloom of Winter there was the potential for renewal and that it has arrived. Spring carries with it the promise of better times, both literally in terms of the warmth of Summer and metaphorically as well. We often use the Seasons to illustrate the passage of our lives and also depict the Seasons as persons in their own right - just think of Botticelli's Primavera. But I digress because I wanted to also say that sometimes just having the promise of better days to come is as good as having them arrive. For my part I prefer the promise of Christmas Eve to the seemingly inevitable heartburn of Christmas Day. Let's all enjoy the promise that Spring gives us of warmer days and try not to remember that when the temperature soars we will probably wish Summer had never arrived!

Owen Beale

Self Observation and Awareness

When a person has need of a self-help therapy, a technique to practise can often be recommended. As with prescribing medicine for an illness, the patient needs to take the medicine as prescribed for it to have any benefits. Take for example a person who wishes to give up smoking. The objective is difficult to achieve and requires both determination and a concerted conscious effort to achieve the desired result. As with smoking there are many other habits that we might wish to bring under control. Trying to lose weight is another good example that most of us are familiar with.

Each of us has subtle cravings for various things and some of those things can at times be too personal to discuss. However, **we all have the ability to change at least some of our habits and cravings if we decide to try**, the question being which ones are worth trying to change and how can we do so effectively? As Unitarians we might well have other more subtle aspirations to pursue that may require a measure of self mastery to reach, but how do we develop such self-changing skills and why are they useful?

Those who practise meditation tend to develop good self-observation skills, becoming both more aware and mindful of what they are consciously doing, rather than just allowing our habits and conditioned ideas to automatically control us. In order to assess how we might wish to improve we usually need to carefully observe ourselves and then evaluate what we observe, making deductions often at a later time, perhaps when we have time to reflect on events that have occurred.

A significant barrier to this inclination can be our perpetual (often irrelevant) thoughts, particularly if we are so often busy doing things perhaps rather hastily, as modern life can frequently demand. So when and why would we want to make that extra effort to try to be even more in control than before? In a way we might initially see it as a way of first letting go, in order to create that welcomed time and space, such that things might naturally fall more into place. Then, after finding a state of inner relaxation and improved composure, we can then gradually observe ourselves more effortlessly, in order to decide how to steer ourselves with less effort but with more conscious direction.

At first it may seem to be a waste of time going over old ground, again and again. With patience the benefits gradually start to reveal

themselves as we begin to notice more about ourselves and our way of learning from what we have observed.

From personal experience I have deduced that it is better to form our ideas and opinions based on both experience and analysis, rather than just from analysis alone. May I suggest that developing this new habit (if it is a new one) might well be therapeutic for most of us, and offer us a chance to more sensitively take to our reins? The choice of how to do this can be up to each one of us and, if our inner vision has a more spiritual thirst, perhaps **our Unitarian ideas and activities might help us along our way towards greater personal growth.**

Kevin Edwards

Poetry Corner

Now the green blade riseth from the buried grain,
Wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.

John Crum

Publicity and Welcoming at UNM

Sue Woolley has kindly agreed to come to UNM on Sunday 10th May to take the service and talk about a project she has been undertaking. There will be a meeting after the service for members of the congregation and particularly Vestry members to discuss this further. As Sue estimated it would last about an hour to an hour and a half in addition to her address on the subject those interested should bring some sandwiches with them.

The project was a Publicity Survey on behalf of the Midland Union and **the purpose was to find out how easily a stranger would be able to find out about his or her local Unitarian congregation.** Sue would also like to discuss Gift Aiding and ensuring that we have a modern Constitution in line with Charity Commission regulations.

Hopefully as many people as possible will be able to attend.

Jill Hudson