

Calendar

July

Wednesday 1st	6.30pm Meditation and discussion group
Sunday 5th	11am Morning service with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Wednesday 8th	6.30pm Meditation and discussion group
Sunday 12th	11am Morning service with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Wednesday 15th	6.30pm Meditation and discussion group
Sunday 19th	11am Morning service with Rev. Simon Ramsay Big Lunch following the service 3pm Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Wednesday 22nd	6.30pm Meditation and discussion group
Sunday 26th	11am Morning service with Bronwen Taylor
Wednesday 29th	6.30pm Meditation and discussion group

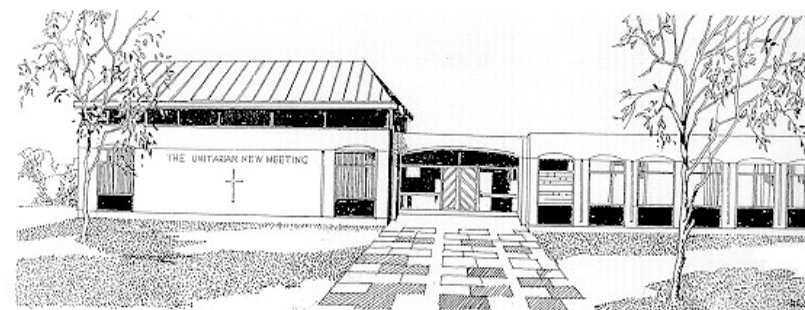
August

Wednesday 1st	6.30pm Meditation and discussion group
Sunday 2nd	11am Morning service with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Wednesday 5th	6.30pm Meditation and discussion group
Sunday 9th	11am Morning service with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Wednesday 12th	6.30pm Meditation and discussion group
Sunday 16th	11am Morning service with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Wednesday 19th	6.30pm Meditation and discussion group
Sunday 23rd	11am Morning service with Rev. Simon Ramsay Picnic following the service at the Whites' house
Wednesday 26th	6.30pm Meditation and discussion group
Sunday 30th	11am Morning service with Rev. Simon Ramsay

September

Wednesday 2nd	6.30pm Meditation and discussion group
Sunday 6th	11am Morning service with Rev. Simon Ramsay

Unitarian New Meeting Birmingham



July and August 2009

He that has light within his own clear breast
May sit I' the centre, and enjoy bright day:
But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts
Benighted walks under the midday sun;
Himself is his own dungeon.

John Milton From Paradise Lost

I think in very British ways! When it rains I bemoan the rain and when it is hot I bemoan the heat. There seem very few days where the weather is perfect for me and often the same can be said of life. There are always tasks in church that need to be completed and more often than not there a quite a large number of tasks that

demand our attention. But let us focus a minute of a number of recent initiatives that have been a great success:

The first is that Verena is running our mother and toddler group on a Tuesday morning. The first week there was one mother with a baby and the second week there two mothers and three babies. Well done Verena! This project came out of our meetings for our new formed social action group so that people could express their spirituality in and through serving others.

The second is our new service which is on the third Sunday of the month. This service is aimed at people that are not that comfortable with a traditional hymn sandwich. So we put placed the chairs in a horse shoe shape, we have recorded music played, we have a short film projected onto the screen, sing a chant, say a few prayers and each of us is invited to speak upon the theme of the service. The first new service in June was a trial and according to the feed back of participants it was judged as a great success. So I am hoping that the service on July 19th at 3 o'clock will also do as well.

Now onto the points that I need willing volunteers for during the month of July:

On Saturday the 4th of July we are serving as a 'stop off point' for the Birmingham Peace Walk. People will be arriving at 1030 and I will need willing volunteers to help serve refreshments.

On Sunday the 19th of July we are joining in with the Big Lunch which is a scheme initiated by the Eden Project to bring people closer by sitting and sharing food together. On that day we will be holding our Agape meal outside the church to welcome others and to show people outside of our church who we are. So I hope that each of us will make an extra special effort not only to come to church, but to also join in with the lunch.

I have had a number of people tell me that on visiting our church that they are attracted by its warmth of spirit, how natural everyone seems to be and how by attending they feel that they are joining a large extended family. Personally I am proud that we are a community where people can be themselves and explore the meaning of their life. Like the weather there are few perfect days in our community when all tasks have been completed. Let us, however, not focus too keenly on what hasn't been done and look to the many successes that have been achieved. Let us also, however, continue to strive together to create a sacred space where all are welcomed and a place where people may strive in freedom to break out of their personal dungeons and experience the bright clear light within.

Simon Ramsay

Message from the Chairman

Hello everyone. By the time you read this Tracy and Charlie and I will be either on holiday or just back from it and we are really looking forward to getting away. We're trying to sell our house and move to one a little bigger because of the extra space we need for all of Charlie's stuff. That's a really exhausting exercise as you will all know from personal experience. But whatever it is that is stressing us we all need the chance to get away once in a while. I have to confess that this holiday is really my choice since we are going to Wales to what Tracy calls "tin bath land" because of the lack of amenities!

I have gone on holiday to the same place every year of my life. It's a little shack, over 100 years old that my father bought and which has no electricity, no gas (except in bottles), no water (except from the spring) and its very own cesspit (don't ask). It's always been known

to us as the "Shanty" and you can see why Tracy calls it what she does. For me and my siblings it is like going home because we have been going there for so long that it is a vital part of our childhood memories. It means a lot to me to be able to go there. These days I particularly like it because there is no mobile telephone signal either. I can relax there in a way I can't anywhere else.

But I have to remember that Tracy has had to adapt to this form of holiday and to understand that it isn't what she would choose being a 4 star hotel kind of a girl at heart. This means that she doesn't relax in the way that I would and that it's really kind of her to share this time with me. More so this year because we have Charlie to look after. I'm really looking forward to sharing the place with him and I hope that he'll grow to love it the way that I do but it'll certainly be less relaxing this year!

I guess if there is any kind of a moral in this it is that we have to bear in mind that the world is a big place and that there is every opportunity for other people to disagree about things and be right even when we hold the opposite view and that we all have to be able to compromise some times for the people we love. If Charlie loves the place the way I do then poor Tracy is really stuck! He'll always want to go back. But we do try and have a holiday each year that doesn't involve going to Wales, even though for me that's a bit of a disappointment in itself. And I want to thank Tracy for all her understanding about my choice of holiday.

Owen Beale

Unitarian Joke

Being a Unitarian minister is like pushing a wheelbarrow full of frogs.

Forthcoming events

Sunday 19th July

Big Lunch Agape Meal. To celebrate communities and join in with the 'Big Lunch' project, we will be having our Agape meal outside the church. This is a change of date from that previously announced.

Sunday 23rd August

Picnic and Garden party. At the home of Catherine and Graham White. This is a change of date from that previously announced.

Friday 28th to Sunday 30th August

Unitarian Music Society Annual Conference. The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, Derbyshire. For more information please contact Adrienne Wilson (01483 421905) or see <http://www.unitarian.org.uk/ums.htm>

Friday 18th to Sunday 20th September

Unitarian Society of Psychological Studies Annual Conference. The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, Derbyshire. For more information please contact Jo Rogers (015395 68631) or see <http://www.unitariansocieties.org.uk/psychical/index.html>

Wayside Pulpit

The world and the universe is an extremely beautiful place, and the more we understand about it the more beautiful does it appear.

Richard Dawkins

About the congregation

Unitarian New Meeting Church is a loving and caring community that values freedom of belief and religion, worshipping in the heart of Birmingham. You are warmly welcomed to any of our services or events.

We are affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarians and Free Christians, and the Midland Unitarian Association.

You can find us in Ryland Street, Birmingham B16 8BL
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About the calendar

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Contributions are most welcome. The next deadline is 15th August.

All views expressed in this calendar represent those of their author(s) and not necessarily the congregation. By convention, any unsigned articles are written by the editor.

Calendar upgrade

You might have noticed some slight alterations – I prefer to think of them as improvements – to the calendar this month. Just as I was finishing drafting the calendar, I attended a publicity workshop organised by the Midland Unitarian Association.

Not only did I get some useful tips from the presentation on newsletters, but I also had the opportunity to have a look at some of the other newsletters, diaries and calendars from across the Midlands.

So, I've (unilaterally) decided to upgrade some of the formatting, and add a section explaining a little bit about our congregation in Birmingham – if you're reading this, and you're not a member, you can get a little idea of what we stand for. It also means that there's more room to include information about future events.

Angela Maher

Poetry corner

A True Hymn

My Joy, my Life, my Crown !
My heart was meaning all the day,
Somewhat it fain would say,
And still it runneth muttering up and down
With only this, My Joy, my Life, my Crown !

Yet slight not those few words ;
If truly said, they may take part
Among the best in art :

The fineness which a hymn or psalm affords
Is, when the soul unto the lines accord.

He who craves all the mind,
And all the soul, and strength, and time,
If the words only rhyme,
Justly complains that somewhat is behind
To make His verse, or write a hymn in kind.

Whereas if the heart be moved,
Although the verse be somewhat scant,
God doth supply the want ;
As when the heart says, sighing to be approved,
“O, could I love !” and stops, God writeth, “Loved.”

George Herbert

Children’s Corner

Vespers

Little boy kneels at the foot of the bed,
Droops on the little hands little gold head.
Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares!
Christopher Robin is saying his prayers.

God bless Mummy, I know that’s right.
Wasn’t it fun in the bath to-night?
The cold is so cold and the hot is so hot.
Oh! God bless Daddy. I quite forgot.

If I open my fingers a little bit more,
I can see Nanny’s dressing-gown on the door.
It’s a beautiful blue, but it hasn’t a hood.

Oh! God bless Nanny and make her good.

Mine has a hood and I lie in bed,
And pull the hood right over my head,
And I shut my eyes, and I curl up small,
And nobody knows that I’m there at all.

Oh! Thank you God for a lovely day.
And what was the other thing I had to say?
I said “Bless Daddy” so what can it be?
Oh! Now I remember it. God bless me.

Little boy kneels at the foot of the bed,
Droops on the little hands little gold head.
Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares!
Christopher Robin is saying his prayers.

A.A. Milne

Thoughts on ‘Vespers’ by A.A. Milne

I wonder how many of us remember with affection this lovely poem by A.A. Milne? For me it expresses beautifully the innocence of a young child at prayer.

Then it makes me ponder as to whether I, myself, have really matured in the art of prayer since childhood. Frequently, my concentration is lacking, or I begin to feel sleepy, and my mind wanders away at a tangent from the main theme of my prayer – just like Christopher Robin in the poem! Of course, I have learned not to ask for material things, like children usually do.

Since I fail to define ‘God’ satisfactorily, I tend to think I’m praying to the Spirit of the Universe, I ask this ‘Spirit’ to guide my decisions, to help me to understand others, to help me to overcome difficulties with more courage etc. Like Christopher Robin I ask this Spirit to

bless others, especially me sick friends; to bring them acceptance and peace of mind. Oh! and as Christopher Robin says, “Bless me” to!

It seems quite natural to ask for help, or to say ‘Thank you’ for moments of satisfaction and joy. Yet despite what I’ve written above, often I am still uncertain as to whom I am addressing my thoughts, or prayers. I find I respond more easily to Simon’s spoken prayers, than trying to form prayers of my own. Am I just lazy? Do others respond in the same way?

However, the Wednesday meditation seems to be helping me. I find that I prefer to think quietly about the beauty of Nature and the wonders of the Universe, and how I am a minute part of this creation. Together with Simon’s readings and prayers, I sometimes have a feeling of stillness and calm; the same soft of feeling of serenity which I get as I wander through a quiet leafy forest, or watch the gentle lapping of waves along a deserted shore.

Perhaps this is what is meant by meditation; a warm closeness to Nature – to our source of being? I don’t know, but I find it a relaxing, peaceful experience. Perhaps I am progressing after all! Does anyone else feel, or think as I do?

Verena Moulton

Michael Servetus

Miguel Servet was born in 1511, and he was one of the 'Renaissance men'. He was the first European to describe the circulation of blood between the heart and the lungs and he wrote commentaries on Ptolemy’s ‘Geography’. Oh, and he was one of the first figures to write of the unity, rather than the trinity, of the Christian God.

In the days of pamphlets, tracts and religious argument, where Latin was the language educated people across Europe communicated in, Miguel Servet became Michael Servetus, author of works such as ‘On the Errors of the Trinity’.

Sadly for Servetus, his views didn’t catch on. He was also less than polite to Jean Calvin, the religious leader of Geneva. Servetus mixed disdain and personal abuse into his letters on theology. With the benefit of hindsight, this might have been a mistake.

Servetus was denounced in Vienne and questioned by the French inquisitor’s men. He fled in the direction of Italy, and no one is quite sure why he stopped off in Geneva. He was recognised and arrested when he attended a service taken by Calvin. Servetus was tried for denying the existence of the Trinity, and also for rejecting the baptism of infants. He was convicted by the court and burnt at the stake for heresy.

Servetus legacy is mixed. He influenced the Unitarians of Poland (who later disappeared) and of Transylvania (who are still going strong), but he didn't seem to have much direct impact on Unitarians in England or the American colonies, which are rooted much more in the rebels against the Church of England, either in the mid-sixteenth century or later, more than 100 years after Servetus.

I think it's interesting that Unitarianism has always been outside the mainstream, even back in the day when the Bible was accepted as more or less literal truth. I guess Servetus was willing to stay outside the mainstream without compromise, although he might have done well to be a bit more polite to Calvin who actually didn't have anyone else executed for heresy at all.

Angela Maher