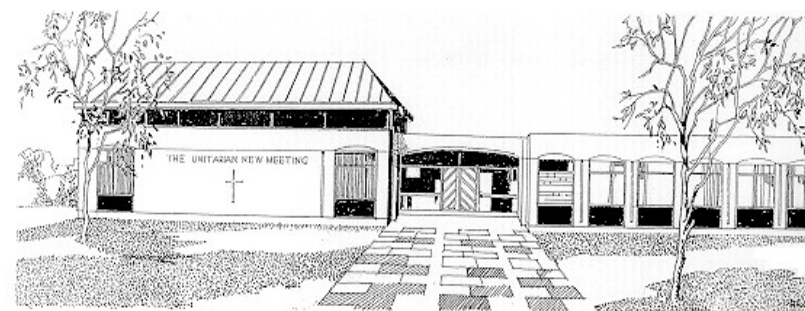


Calendar

December

Wednesday 2nd	6.30pm Meditation and Discussion Group
Sunday 6th	11am Toy Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay Stewards: Owen Beale and Ian Cook
Wednesday 9th	6.30pm Meditation and Discussion Group
Sunday 13th	11am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay Children's activities during the service Catered Christmas Lunch following the service, tickets required. Stewards: Angelic Gomez and Angela Maher
Wednesday 16th	6.30pm Meditation and Discussion Group
Sunday 20th	3pm Carols by Candlelight Stewards: Hazel Reynolds and Jill Hudson
Friday 25th Xmas	11am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay
January	
Sunday 3rd	11am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay Stewards: Alan Barker and David Jones
Wednesday 6th	6.30pm Meditation and Discussion Group
Sunday 10th	11am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay Stewards: Winnie Gordon and Graham White
Wednesday 13th	6.30pm Meditation and Discussion Group
Sunday 17th	11am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay Children's activities during the service. Agape Meal following the service Stewards: Owen Beale and Ian Cooke
Wednesday 20th	6.30pm Meditation and Discussion Group
Sunday 24th	11am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay Stewards: Alan Barker and David Jones
Wednesday 27th	6.30pm Meditation and Discussion Group
Sunday 31st	11am Morning Service with Rev. Simon Ramsay Stewards: Bryan Wood and Josie Whitely

Unitarian New Meeting Birmingham



December 2009 and January 2010

What is Christmas?

It is tenderness for the past, courage for the present, hope for the future. It is a fervent wish that every cup may overflow with blessings rich and eternal and that every path may lead to peace.

I can't believe that Christmas has come around so soon! It only seems like yesterday that we were gearing ourselves up for the Christmas Fayre that we held last year. Last year there was so much work to do that by the third week of December everyone had appeared to have run out of steam, leaving the programme for

Christmas toward the end of the month poorly attended. Although the Christmas Fayre went well and we achieved over and above our aims this year we have opted for a Christmas programme that is a little less busy allowing each of us to join together in the spirit of Christmas and enjoy the season.

You will have received with your calendar a post card with the Christmas programme on it. You will see that we still have our **Toy Service on the first Sunday of December** when we collect presents to be distributed to those families on a low income with children.

We also have the **Christmas Lunch on the second Sunday of December** which you will have to buy a ticket for; in previous times too many people have signed up and not attended or turn up without having signed up to stay for lunch. If the cost of the tickets, £6 for adults and £3 for children, is beyond your Christmas budget please come and speak with me.

On the third Sunday of December our **Carols by Candlelight service will be held at 3 P.M.** For this event we have invited the residents of Robert Austin Court to attend and we have also advertised all around the local area.

Then the final service of December which is on **Christmas Day** and for only half an hour. When I first became the minister of UNM I thought that this particular service would not be well attended and I was wrong! This service, in my mind, starts Christmas day in the right way.

Whatever your plans are at Christmas it would be wonderful to see you all as much as possible over this festive season. At this most commercial time of the year it is good to get together and explore the meaning that Christmas has for us. It is a time to find tenderness

Forthcoming Events

Winter Walking in Derbyshire

When: Friday 22nd January to Sunday 24th January or

Wednesday 27th January to Friday 29th January

Where: The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

Further details from Stella Burney (01298) 871218

Junior Weekend (Age 7-11)

When: Friday 5th to Sunday 7th February

Where: The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

Further details at <http://www.unitarian.org.uk/info/events.shtml> or

Louise Shatliff on 0161 280 3577

Gather the Spirit through Music – Unitarian Music Society

When: Wednesday 17th to Friday 19th February

Where: The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

Further details at <http://www.unitarian.org.uk/info/events.shtml> or

Helen Merritt (0151) 625 5488

General Assembly Annual Meetings

When: Thursday 8th to Sunday 11th April

Where: University of Nottingham

If you would like to be a delegate for Unitarian New Meeting, contact Rev. Simon Ramsay.

Wayside Pulpit

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy.

Francis Pharcellus Church

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
Tel: 0121 455 8818 Website : www.birminghamnewmeeting.org.uk
e-mail: info@birminghamnewmeeting.org.uk

Minister: Rev. Simon Ramsay
230 The Avenue, Birmingham B27 6NU
Tel: 0121 243 1560 Mobile: 07915 618549
e-mail: ramsaysimon@btinternet.com

Secretary: Ms Jill Hudson
100 Elizabeth Road, New Oscott, Sutton Coldfield, B73 5AS
Tel: 0121 605 0389

About the calendar

Editor: Angela Maher amaher@theiet.org
c/o Unitarian New Meeting Church, 31 Ryland St, Birmingham B16 8BL

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

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.

for the past, courage for the present and hope for the future. It is a time where we can recognise the blessings that each of us have had to affirm our intention to continue to tread our path toward peace.

On behalf of the family Ramsay I wish you all a happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Simon Ramsay

Message from the Chair

Hello everyone. When you read this Christmas will be almost upon us. This, rather than the New Year is when I find myself looking back on the last 12 months. We have all had a busy time over the last year and it has certainly seen some changes for us as a congregation. We have lost two of our elder statesman in Philip Crosskey (I have written about his part previously in these pages) and now in Frank Hytch. I don't feel that I know enough about what Frank did for New Meeting to do him justice. His was one of the faces that was always there as I grew up and there was some danger that he was taken for granted.

He acted as Secretary for a very long time but served in a number of other positions on the Vestry as well, including as Chairman. He was one of those responsible for keeping New Meeting going during the times that we lacked a minister, both after Vernon Marshall's departure and also after the short incumbency of Robin Boyes. As Secretary one of his tasks was to fill the pulpit - to make sure we had a preacher every Sunday. He worked hard to do this and it must have taken a great deal of his time - it is one of the Secretary's harder tasks even now to fill the pulpit when Simon is absent but Frank did this for years. He gave a number of sermons himself and preached well if a little diffidently.

He seemed to me to be a very unassuming man and one who was

happier in the background. Perhaps as a result we lost sight of his position in the wider movement because as editor of the Unitarian he will be much missed and he was respected by those who knew him. To us he was one of those people who actually make sure that the church keeps on going. As such we owe him a great debt of gratitude. We would not be where we are today without his efforts.

He did not have an altogether easy life. His son Michael was killed in a motorcycle accident at 18 and Frank had to spend much of his time in later years looking after Jean who died shortly after he did. His last illness was difficult for all concerned but I hope that he rests easy now and let him be in our thoughts for a little while longer.

Having written about Frank it seems almost rude to direct your attention elsewhere but I hope that you will make the most of all the Christmas activities we have planned and do what you can to take part. In particular I think of the sterling efforts we made last year, directed by Bini and Winnie, and hope that our most modest efforts this year (still in the planning stage as I write) will prove as worthwhile. Please do what you can to help. We will have a Toy Service and a Christmas lunch as well as a Carol Service and a short service on Christmas Day so there is much to occupy us and if we take the time to help others at this season we will be starting to tread in the footsteps of Philip and Frank. If we can do that then we will be in worthy company!

Finally, by the time you read this Tracy, Charlie and I will have moved house. I daren't put the new address in the Calendar yet lest I tempt fate but don't worry you'll still be able to get hold of us!

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all!

Owen Beale

Seasonal Celebrations – Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is an African-American celebration that begins on 26th December and lasts for 7 days. It honours African heritage and culture, particularly the seven principles of:

- Umoja – Unity
- Kujichagulia – Self-Determination
- Ujima – Collective Work and Responsibility
- Ujamaa – Cooperative Economics
- Nia – Purpose
- Kuumba – Creativity
- Imani – Faith

Kwanzaa celebrations are often marked by lighting a kinara – a type of candle holder and pouring libations. The festival was created by Ron Karenga and was first celebrated in December 1966. Several million people participate worldwide, primarily in the United States.

Angela Maher

Keeping in Contact

It is often difficult for church officers to contact members of the congregation, you might find that either a voice message service, or email address would help you keep in touch more easily.

If you have an internet connection, or can use one at the library (or similar) then you can sign up for a free email address from <http://mail.google.com>.

If you have a BT phone, you can use their free voicemail service. You'll know there's a message waiting for you because you'll hear an interrupted dial tone when you next pick up the phone. To check your messages just dial 1571.

Poetry Corner

Here we come a-wassailing
Among the leaves so green,
Here we come a-wand'ring
So fair to be seen.
Love and joy come to you,
And to you your wassail, too,
And God bless you, and send you
A Happy New Year,
And God send you a Happy New Year.

God bless the master of this house,
Likewise the mistress too;
And all the little children
That round the table go.
Love and joy come to you,
And to you your wassail, too,
And God bless you, and send you
A Happy New Year,
And God send you a Happy New Year.

Meetings

The next House committee meeting is Sunday 31st January.

The next Ministry committee meeting is Sunday 7th February.

The next Vestry committee meeting is Sunday 14th February.

If you have something you wish to bring up at any meeting, you can speak to Rev. Simon Ramsay, our minister, Owen Beale, our chair, or any member of the Vestry committee.

from 'Why do Unitarian Universalists celebrate Christmas?'

This is what a Unitarian Universalist does with Christmas, does at Christmas. We sing. We light candles. We hope for a better world.

"If we cannot believe in God as a noun," Buechner says, *"maybe we can still believe in God as a verb."* God as a verb takes as its object the world itself, Christianity teaches us to look at one another right in the eye, as Buechner says the Pope did that Christmas Eve, looking for someone, someone in particular.

"Maybe holiness will come again," Buechner says, *"not as the Son of Man with eyes of fire and a two-edged sword in his mouth, but as a child who has maybe already been born into our world and beneath whose face the face of Jesus is at this moment starting to burn through, like the moon through the clouds."*

Hope, come again as a child. This child Jesus, pointing to all our children, in Baghdad and in Beirut and in Boston, and in all the children we hold dear. Merry Christmas, we say to one another, looking each other right in the eyes.

Gary. E Smith

Change of Address

Owen Beale's new address is:

43 St. Dunstan's Crescent
Battenhall
Worcester WR5 2AF
Telephone number remains (01905) 351226

Stewards rota

The new stewards rota has been distributed to all stewards. If you can't make your week, please find a substitute. If you have any problems, please contact Hazel Reynolds.

Calendar deadlines

A reminder that if I am to have any hope at all of getting the calendar out on time, I need all contributions by 15th of the preceding month.

The next deadline is 15th January.

Angela Maher, Editor

Thanks for donation

Many thanks to Jean Dyer for her kind donation to the printing costs of the calendar.

If you would like to make a donation, you can send it to the church, any cheques should be made payable to Unitarian New Meeting.

Midland Unitarian Association Annual Lunch

On the 31st October, Unitarians from across the Midlands gathered at Kingswood Chapel in Hollywood, for our annual lunch. The gathering began with a talk from Rev. Bob Wightman, the current president of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, and was followed by sherry and lunch in the schoolroom.

Angela Maher

Seasonal Celebrations - Winter Solstice

The reason for the season isn't Jesus, but the winter solstice, celebrated as Yule. Much of pre-Christian Europe celebrated in midwinter the longest night and the turning point between nights getting longer, to nights getting shorter, and looking forward to the summer. Christians, took over this traditional date for their Christmas celebrations to help with converting pagans they met.

In Britain many traditional Christmas customs actually originated in the pre-Christian celebration of Yule, these include mistletoe, decorating with evergreens which symbolise life and growth even in the dark winter.

Yule is also the origin of the tradition of the yule log. The Celts thought that the sun stood still for twelve days in the middle of winter and during this time a log was lit to conquer the darkness, banish evil spirits and bring luck for the coming year. The custom of burning a large log for the festive season continued into the medieval era, where it was alight for the twelve days from Christmas until Epiphany.

In the modern era, many people have rediscovered the pagan festivals and celebrate them as part of Earth centred religion. This includes some Unitarians, particularly the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network in the UK, and the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPs) in the United States.

You can find more information about Earth centred spirituality in Unitarianism at <http://www.unitariansocieties.org.uk/earthspirit>.

Angela Maher