



## Unitarian New Meeting Church Birmingham

### April 2010 Calendar

A church of open hearts and open minds

---

## Unitarian New Meeting, Birmingham

---

### Minister's thoughts

"Big is nothing other than a whole lot of 'smalls'. Small things can actually transform the world." Masami Sato

Calling all aspiring singers and those that just like to have a jolly good go! We are, once again, **re-starting the choir**. What's different this time? I hear you ask. The answer is, musical accompaniment and tuition under the expertise of the Reverend Anthony Howe from the Kingswood Chapel. The first session will be on **Tuesday 20th April at 6:30pm** and then every other week. For the less confident among you I would like to reassure you that you don't need to be the next potential X factor winner, but just have a willingness to join in and have fun.

Also, starting on **Monday 12th April at 7:30 pm** is a course that will help you work out **where you stand spiritually**. This course is designed not to tell you how to think, but to help you reach your own conclusions by discussing a variety of themes. The last time this course was run it was well attended and a great success. I am not promising that you will find all the answers to the riddle of life, but you may well learn to ask the right questions and progress further along on your own spiritual journey.

I would also like to share with all the parents and young people of the congregation that we now have **children's activities on the third Sunday of the month**. This is also the Sunday that we have the **Agape meal** (which if you didn't know is a bring and share lunch). This is wonderful family fellowship time for all of us, so I hope to see you there.

Simon Ramsay

---

tel 0121 123 1234  
email: [info@birminghamnewmeeting.org.uk](mailto:info@birminghamnewmeeting.org.uk)

## Message from the Chair

So here we are in April. Only a month before our Annual General meeting on 16th May 2010. I know I've said this before but if there is one Sunday of the year when you should make an effort and come to church it has to be that Sunday! A church is not a building it is the congregation and the literal meaning of that word is those that come together. It's not just being listed as a member that counts - it's joining in that matters.

Enough of that. April is one of my favourite months because it is Springtime and just the start of Spring at that. I know Spring officially starts at midnight on March 20th (the Vernal Equinox to those in the know or with access to wikipedia!) but it's April that lets you see things really start to change and you can see Winter being left behind. The

power of Spring to entrance people can be seen in the popularity of such things as the Springwatch programme on the TV. But the wonder of it is that all you have to do is go outside and open your eyes to the world around you to see it in all its glory.

I don't know what it is about Winter, maybe the darkness, maybe the cold but in the depth of Winter you really don't want to pay that much attention to the world outside your door. Getting the urge to go outside again is magical in a way that I just can't put into words. Go outside and look at some catkins and that will explain it in a way I cannot. As you may remember we moved house last Autumn and one of the good things we have found in our new garden is the proliferation of snowdrops just outside our kitchen window. Not only do

## Unitarian New Meeting, Birmingham

we owe a debt of gratitude to the previous occupiers it also reminds me of Keith Hill's snowdrop service every time I look outside.

We need to take encouragement from this miracle and find in ourselves a renewed sense of purpose

about our lives. This leads neatly back into my opening reminder about our AGM. Why not use that sense of purpose to help you attend church!

Owen Beale

## "All are welcome here" - but do they know it?

I'd like to start by stating clearly and simply that it is not my intention to offend or exclude any member of our community. I am trying to generate debate about an issue which several people within the church have raised with me and about which I feel quite strongly.

First impressions count for a lot, and it struck me on my first visit to New Meeting that, from the outside, we appear to be a Christian church. The evidence is quite obvious to

anyone passing by: there's a huge cross on the wall. In case you might have missed that, there's also the quotation above the front door, which is from Psalm 100.

Neither of these things is bad. However, to the casual observer, who perhaps doesn't know the name and history of the Unitarians, our church isn't any different from the many other Christian churches in the Birmingham area. This would be all well

and good, if our community identified exclusively as Christian, and wished to advertise this.

My proposal is that we **replace the cross on the outside wall with a beautiful flaming chalice**. Maybe we could commission a local artist to design one, and perhaps at the same time change the words above the entrance.

My personal beliefs have changed considerably since moving to Birmingham, and I have New Meeting and Simon to thank for that. For many years I was a staunch atheist, even pitying 'poor believers'! I placed my faith in science. I have since come to understand that my rejection of Christianity, which really began in my teens, was actually a rejection of the negative associations of the language and the the evil done in the name of

Christianity in this nation and elsewhere. In fact, I now consider myself to be a Christian, and profess belief in God, although what I mean by those words may differ greatly from anyone else!

I'm sharing this because I want to reassure anyone who may see removing the cross as an attack on our liberal Christian roots. It really isn't. I believe that our heritage is something to be cherished and explored, but I would not impose that on a newcomer to the church.

**I really do feel that we are doing ourselves a great disservice by advertising ourselves as exclusively Christian (intentionally or otherwise).** Our forebears suffered greatly and worked extremely hard to win us the religious freedom we enjoy today, and I wouldn't want someone to walk past the church and dismiss it as just

## Unitarian New Meeting, Birmingham

another church when we can offer so much more:

Our lack of creed is a great strength and one reason why our message is so important these days. Many people claim to be spiritual but not religious and seek wisdom from many sources. Some of these people may wish to attend a church like ours, where they aren't preached to as receivers of handed-down knowledge, but are part of the worship and spiritual growth themselves.

Our community is a safe and friendly place where people can explore the mysteries of the universe and life without fear of criticism; without feeling guilty or ashamed of their honest doubts and questions. **Our Christian heritage has an important part to play in this** and forms a solid base from which we can explore all the religions of the world in our quest for truth

and understanding and instilling love in all beings.

**But I genuinely believe that, by replacing the cross with a chalice, we would be removing an obstacle from the path of those seekers who have not yet found us** and who could benefit from our empowering ethos and find a home here.

My concern about the quotation is that it implies belief in a monotheistic male God. There's nothing wrong with that belief, but it's not the only one people have. I don't think it accurately reflects our whole community, and I would prefer more inclusive and welcoming words. **The more people we welcome into the church - even for one service - the more our message of love and fellowship will ripple outwards and transform the people of this great city!**

I have submitted this article now because we are fast approaching the AGM on Sunday 16th May. I would really like to see this issue debated at the meeting to make sure that whatever action we take, it is the democratic decision of our community, informed by everyone's opinion. Please do

try to attend if you can. We have the freedom and responsibility to shape the future of this church, but we must be willing to play our part!

If you feel strongly about this either way, feel free to grab me, I'd love to chat about it!

Allan Warhurst

## Constance Harfield-Bradley

Connie was for many years an Associate Member of the Unitarian New Meeting. A talented interior designer she originally ran her business from Broad Street before moving to Upton-on-Severn which limited her connection with the Unitarian New Meeting, to the extent that most present members never had the privilege of personal contact and friendship. But you never met Connie without her asking about the Church and her contribution to the interior furnishings at the time the Church was built, and subsequently when these needed renewing, was much appreciated.

At the Service on 19th February she was remembered with affection and again afterwards at the Vestry Committee Meeting. She was warm hearted, talented and a loving wife and mother who will be sadly missed by all her many friends.

Graham White

## Unitarian New Meeting, Birmingham

### Forthcoming events

#### **Christa: The Female Christ: Exploring the humanity of Christ through Theology and Art**

When: Saturday 17th April, 10.30am to 4.00pm

Where: St Marks Church, Broomhill, Sheffield

Cost: £10, lunches extra

Further details from [info@stmarkscrc.co.uk](mailto:info@stmarkscrc.co.uk)

#### **Worship Studies Course Foundation Step**

Where: Kingswood Meeting House, Worcs. B47 5DQ

When: Saturdays 22nd May, 12th June and 10th July 2010

10.00am to 4.15pm. (coffee and tea from 9.30 a.m.)

Total Cost: £29 (to Midland Unitarian Association delegates)

Further details from Sue Woolley on 01604 870746 or

[sue.woolley@virgin.net](mailto:sue.woolley@virgin.net)

#### **Open Day Weekend at Hucklow**

When: Friday 28th May to Monday 31st May

Where: Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

Further details from Stella Burney on 01298 871218

#### **Unitarian Youth Bridging Weekend** for ages 16 to 21 (ish)

When: Friday 2nd to Sunday 4th July

Where: Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

Cost: £45

Further details from Sarah Warhurst on 0796 815 8939

## April

<b>Sunday 4</b>	11am Worship with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Wednesday 7	6.30pm Midweek Meditation
<b>Sunday 11</b>	11am Worship with Simon Ramsay
Monday 12	7.30pm Exploring spirituality
Wednesday 14	6.30pm Midweek Meditation
<b>Sunday 18</b>	11am Worship with Rev. Simon Ramsay Children's activities during the service Agape Meal following the service
Monday 19	7.30pm Exploring spirituality
Tuesday 20	6.30pm Choir practice
Wednesday 21	6.30pm Midweek Meditation
<b>Sunday 25</b>	11am Worship with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Wednesday 28	6.30pm Midweek Meditation

Imagination will often carry us to worlds that never were. But without it we go nowhere.

Carl Sagan

## Unitarian New Meeting, Birmingham

## May

<b>Sunday 2</b>	11am Worship with Kristian Wilkes
Tuesday 4	6.30pm Choir practice
Wednesday 5	6.30pm Midweek Meditation
<b>Sunday 9</b>	11am Worship with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Wednesday 12	6.30pm Midweek Meditation
<b>Sunday 16</b>	11am Worship with Rev. Simon Ramsay Children's activities during the service <b>Agape Meal and AGM following the service</b>
Monday 17	7.30pm Exploring spirituality
Tuesday 18	6.30pm Choir practice
Wednesday 19	6.30pm Midweek Meditation
<b>Sunday 23</b>	11am Worship with Rev. Simon Ramsay
Wednesday 26	6.30pm Midweek Meditation
<b>Sunday 30</b>	11am Worship with Rev. Simon Ramsay

Religion is essentially the art and the theory of the remaking of man. Man is not a finished creation.

Edmund Burke

## 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](http://www.birminghamnewmeeting.org.uk)  
e-mail: [info@birminghamnewmeeting.org.uk](mailto: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](mailto:ramsaysimon@btinternet.com)

Secretary: Ms Jill Hudson 100 Elizabeth Road, New Oscott, Sutton  
Coldfield, B73 5AS Tel: 0121 605 03

## About the calendar

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

Contributions are welcome. **The next deadline is 15th April.**

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.

---

**31 Ryland Street, Birmingham B16 8BL**  
**[www.birminghamnewmeeting.org.uk](http://www.birminghamnewmeeting.org.uk)**

---

## Poetry corner

### Heaven

O who will show me those delights on high?

Echo. I.

Thou Echo, thou art mortall, all men know.

Echo. No.

Wert thou not born among the trees and leaves?

Echo. Leaves.

And are there any leaves, that still abide?

Echo. Bide.

What leaves are they? impart the matter wholly.

Echo. Holy.

Are holy leaves the Echo then of blisse?

Echo. Yes.

Then tell me, what is that supreme delight?

Echo. Light.

Light to the minde : what shall the will enjoy?

Echo. Joy.

But are there cares and businesse with the pleasure?

Echo. Leisure.

Light, joy, and leisure ; but shall they persever?

Echo. Ever.

George Herbert

---