



**Spirit of Life** Unitarian Fellowship  
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## Schedule of Services

Services are held every Sunday at 10:30 at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre

**6 June,** Jan Tendys, **“The Doctrine of Original Sin—any relevance for today?”**

The Copenhagen talks were disappointing, Penny Wong's emissions trading scheme is in limbo, climate change denialists are all over the internet. Why is humanity blundering in this crisis? Are liberals simply wrong in having an optimistic attitude towards human nature?

**13 June,** Ross McLuckie, **“Letters”**

To understand the personality of some Australians by reading their published letters.

**20 June ,** Laurence Gormley,

**27 June,** Claire Morgan, **"Living the Charter for Compassion"**

**This is Claire's debut talk for our group.**

Last November a multi-faith coalition launched the Charter for Compassion. It calls upon people "to make compassion a clear and dynamic force in our polarized world". In this interactive session we will explore whether compassion for self comes before compassion for others and how the Charter can bring about positive change in the world.

**4th July,** Janet Horton, **“Authoring your own Beliefs”**

**11 July,** Candace Parks **"Let's Dream Together."**

**18 July,** Geoff Matthews

**25 July,** Colin Whatmough

## Lightening up

**Rudi Anders**

I have had lots of practice balancing between people who disapprove of each other. When I was about six, my country was at war. The enemy was hated, but I knew my father had old friends in the enemy country, which I had to keep secret. From the age of about ten I became aware of a bitter divide in my large family. I refused to take sides. My playmates were hostile to kids from other schools, but I had friends from two schools. When I was active in a trade union I was supposed to loathe members of another union, but I got on with people in both unions.

Disputes between people can be a comedy of errors. Mishearing a word or having a different definition of a word can start a chain of events that can last a lifetime. A feud can go on for generations. Disagreements over which prophet said what and what they actually meant go on for millennia. Where is the wisdom in that kind of religion?

Two retired, well-educated gentlemen went to a gathering to hear a recorded talk by a philosopher about a harmonious world. One was Jewish and had suffered under the Nazis; he brought someone to perform healing chants. The other, who had risked his life helping Jews against the Nazis, had travelled a long way to hear the philosopher. He objected to the change of agenda, and showed it by ignoring the chanting and reading a book. The chanter said she was insulted, and in an escalating argument the word nasty was used, which the other heard as Nazi. The two chaps had a lot in common, but never found harmony.

I see the funny side of many disputes, which helps me to lighten up. I realize that I can rarely know the full story behind a dispute. A collection of small, subtle, forgotten annoyances and misunderstandings can weaken a relationship, and in my experience it is usually impossible to know exactly how a relationship started to go sour. The crisis may be clear, but I can never know the build-up. Therefore I cannot judge who is right or wrong, if indeed there is a right and wrong; so I remain neutral.

Out-of-character behaviour can be the result of feeling tired, stressed, impatient,

depressed, or it can be caused by a temporary mild mental illness. Poor hearing can also lead to unfortunate disputes. Apart from all that, I am too lazy to analyse all the details of a dispute; it is much easier to give people the benefit of the doubt. A good fight can be energizing, but in the long run conflict is draining and a waste of energy.

I have done stupid things and can't expect anyone else to be without faults. Since people are not perfect, it is easy to find faults in any particular person or group. That is how racism and bias against any kind of group works. Look for faults in redheads, blondes, atheists or religious people and you will find them. It is strange the way we don't notice we do that. Perhaps, since feeling superior is a nice feeling, we don't want humble honesty to spoil that feeling.

Nowadays I take people as I find them, and ignore what anyone says about them. I always try to hear both sides of a story, and even then I often have no opinion. I don't expect anyone to do the right thing all the time. People are a bundle of separate desires, aspirations, ideas and feelings that are often in disharmony. How can I expect to always be in harmony with my friends when I am not in harmony within myself?

As long as dislike of a person commands my attention, that person has power over me. Conflict is a burden that should be resolved or walked away from if possible. Sadly there are cases where someone does not have the ability to get away from a bully or dictator.

**Rudi Anders is a writer and Humanist Society of Victoria member.**

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(Underlining by present editor)

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## DID NOAH FISH?

A Sunday school teacher asked, 'Johnny, do you think Noah did a lot of fishing when he was on the Ark?'

'No,' replied Johnny. 'How could he, with just two worms?'

**Contributed by Candace Parks**

## Who do we think we are?

*Margaret Armstrong*

When an Icelandic volcano challenged humans who thought they could take air travel for granted, I was reminded of Robert Frost's sonnet - "On a Tree Fallen Across the Road," where Nature posed a different challenge :

On a Tree Fallen Across the Road

The tree the tempest with a crash of wood  
Throws down in front of us is not to bar  
Our passage to our journey's end for good,  
But just to ask us who we think we are

Insisting always on our own way so.  
She likes to halt us in our runner tracks,  
And make us get down in a foot of snow  
Debating what to do without an axe.

And yet she knows obstruction is in vain:  
We will not be put off the final goal  
We have it hidden in us to attain,  
Not though we have to seize earth by the pole

And, tired of aimless circling in one place,  
Steer straight off after something into space.

Robert Frost

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The editor says:

**Thank you,  
and more please**

I would like to thank the regular contributors to our newsletter, particularly our "green" Margaret.

The humorous bits and pieces contributed by Candace are also much appreciated; likewise the various items that have been supplied by Eric, Colin, Helen and others. More please everybody!

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## Brisbane Conference

The committee are looking to fund some people to attend the following conference in Brisbane.

**Please let Candace or Laurence know if you are interested in attending.**

Growth Strategies For Small Congregations Workshop in Brisbane, Australia, August 20-22, 2010

ANZUUA and the ICUU present an opportunity to explore specific growth strategies for very small congregations (less than 50 people).

Teams from each attending congregation develop action plans for growth and vitality based on new congregational identity, organizational structures.

We'll focus on mission and vision, understanding shared ministry, mission-based budgeting, and appropriate leadership and organizational structures

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### Encounter

We were riding through frozen fields in a wagon at dawn.  
A red wing rose in the darkness.

And suddenly a hare ran across the road.  
One of us pointed to it with his hand.

That was long ago. Today neither of them is alive,  
Not the hare, nor the man who made the gesture.

O my love, where are they, where are they going?  
The flash of a hand, streak of movement,  
rustle of pebbles.  
I ask not out of sorrow, but in wonder.

~ Czeslaw Milosz ~

(Translated by Czeslaw Milosz and Lillian Vallee)

## God loves drunks too.

A man and his wife were awakened at 3:00 am by a loud pounding on the door. The man gets up and goes to the door where a drunken stranger, standing in the pouring rain, is asking for a push.

"Not a chance, says the husband, it is 3:00 in the morning!" He slams the door and returns to bed.

"Who was that?" asked his wife.

"Just some drunk guy asking for a push," he answers.

"Did you help him?" she asks.

"No, I did not, it is 3:00 in the morning and it is pouring rain out there!"

"Well, you have a short memory," says his wife. "Can't you remember about three months ago when we broke down, and those two guys helped us? I think you should help him, and you should be ashamed of yourself! God loves drunk people too."

The man does as he is told, gets dressed, and goes out into the pounding rain. He calls out into the dark, "Hello, are you still there? "

"Yes," comes back the answer.

"Do you still need a push?" calls out the husband.

"Yes, please!" comes the reply from the dark.

"Where are you?" asks the husband.

"Over here on the swing set," replied the drunk .

**Contributed by Arthur, who has been on our Esprit reading list practically since our Fellowship began.**

**We welcome items from our readership—the friends as well as the members of Spirit of Life.**

## Not so Funny

"I've bled for my country, I've sweated for my country, I've cried myself to sleep for my country -- which is a lot more than some people who are passing judgment on me have done. I would rather go sit in prison than go to Iraq."

Patrick Hart, U.S. Army sergeant with almost 10 years on active duty, who went to Canada rather than face a second deployment to Iraq. (from Sojourner's Magazine)

## NSW's planned relationships register

NSW's planned relationships register doesn't go far enough.

It was once my hope that as more states enacted schemes to formally recognise unmarried couples they would build on existing schemes by granting ever more recognition to an ever wider range of relationships.

I'm not saying I wanted these schemes to replace marriage. That is something they could never do.

Instead I expected them to evolve to become ever more responsive to the needs and aspirations of partners who want to formalise their union but can't or don't want to marry.

I saw them becoming a third tier of relationship recognition; a viable alternative to marriage and de facto status rather than a poor substitute for the former or an add-on to the latter.

Tragically, this is not happening.

The Relationship Register soon to be established in NSW is the lowest common denominator of schemes already in existence.

Unlike schemes in Tasmania and the ACT, the NSW Register doesn't allow for official ceremonies, nor does it recognise a diversity of relationships, including relationships between companions, extended family members, and carers and the people they care for, as well as same and opposite-sex partners.

The NSW scheme insists couples declare they are in an existing cohabiting, de facto relationship, unlike the three other schemes, which do not put such strict conditions on who can enter a formalised partnership.

The NSW scheme demeaningly registers partners, rather than registering a civil-union-equivalent Deed of Relationship or Civil Partnership, as is the case in the other states.....**This is part of an item in The Age (newspaper) May 18, 2010 by Rodney Croome, a spokesman for the Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group who worked closely on the Tasmanian Deed of Relationship registry.**

# Report from the COMMON DREAMS 2 CONFERENCE - Melbourne 15-18th April 2010

*Guy Mallam (CPRT, Freedom to explore).*

The Common Dreams 2 conference had as its theme 'Living the Progressive Dream' and explored how to put into practice many of the ideas expressed in Common Dreams 1 in Sydney three years ago. The conference was well attended and well organized. Strong speakers, exciting ideas, and audience participation were the order of each day.

**Gretta Vosper from Canada challenged us to live out those ideals we considered fundamental rather than pursue sterile dogma, and Fred Plumer from US reported on the strides progressive religious thought has made in the US. Fred also demonstrated a new range of books and materials designed by the US Centre for Progressive Christianity with progressive interpretations for use with children and in schools.**

Val Webb, with her usual penetrating clarity, outlined a vision of how progressives may engage with the divine. Outlines of newly evolving church and church experiences, and the challenges and joys involved in this process were presented by Peter Kennedy from St Mary's in Exile in Brisbane, Francis Macnab from Melbourne and Margaret Mayman from NZ. All had heart-warming accounts of the successes experienced and barriers encountered in their evolutionary challenges to entrenched structures and outmoded ideas, but more particularly, they showed exciting visions for the future.

Greg Jenks from Brisbane drew attention to the exponential growth of Biblical material and commentaries (mostly conservative) on the internet. Lloyd Geering from NZ spoke of how much of thinking and proclamation about Jesus in today's Churches is still pre- 1835! He and Greg Jenks also explained the Jesus Seminar and Westar Institute. Norman Habel from Adelaide explored if there was a green God amongst the grey texts of the Bible.

Those interested in interfaith relations

and gender issues were well catered for. For those interested in the relationship between spirituality and psychology, Francis Macnab's comments and the presentation given by Ian Mavor from Gold Coast on Ken Wilber's Integral Spirituality were a challenge for wider exploration of spirituality. Common Dreams 2 was an exhilarating and challenging experience and one which I hope many more will experience at the next Common Dreams.

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## Petroleum Saved the Whale

Joe Laur

In his 1991 "can't-put-it-down" book *The Prize*, Daniel Yergin writes engagingly about the birth and rise of the petroleum industry. In the 1850's, society was using whale oil for lighting homes, and the big beasts were getting scarcer all the time. Rising prices for whale oil kept whaling ships in the hunt, and a search for a cheap abundant substitute was afoot. Enter "rock oil", petroleum pooling on the ground in Pennsylvania. It was used to make kerosene, and as people switched wholesale to kerosene lamps instead of whale oil, the whaling industry died down, and the whales got a respite from a march to extinction.

**But now petroleum is the problem, not the solution. Like the whales, oil is getting scarcer relative to demand, but rising prices keep oil drilling rigs in the hunt for more crude. A search for green alternatives is afoot, from natural gas (a fossil fuel, but far cleaner and producing far less waste CO2 than oil) to electric vehicles, bio fuels and wind, solar and new generation nuclear power that uses nuclear waste as fuel, dramatically reducing its radioactive danger in the process.**

Oil continues to pour into the Gulf of Mexico as of this writing. The brown crude sludge is reaching beaches, marshes, fisheries and estuaries along the Gulf Coast, killing dolphins, turtles and sea birds. Isn't it time to try a bold new direction? While BP attempts, "top hats", "top kills" and "junk shots" to stem the flow, we have a "unique shot" right now for a "Fuels Revolution" - after all, 2/3rds of the oil we pump goes into fuels and transportation....**Part of an article from Greenopolis ( via Twitter)**

# ETHICS CONFERENCE

*Eric Stevenson*

The current controversy over an alternative for religious education in NSW schools has inspired CPRT to structure a public forum in which consideration will be given to the roll of Progressive Religious Thought in our choice between right and wrong. With the assistance of keynote speakers we would be free to challenge the morality of traditional religion and in particular to explore the most effective ways of imparting an ethical world view to the young. This would also be in keeping with the majority of expressions of interest registered at our recent regional gathering.

Simon Longstaff, Executive Director of the St. James Ethics Centre defines **ethics** as a conversation on “what ought one to do?” He differentiates this from each of the **moral codes** of the various religious faiths. These different moralities for him are therefore contributors to that conversation, but not necessarily final determinants or arbiters. The nihilist philosopher, Nietzsche goes so far as to challenge the morality of Christianity. If we face his challenge and accept Longstaff’s definition, it therefore becomes incumbent upon us to look more critically at our differing moralities to discover whether they are still of relevance in helping us to determine “ethical” human behaviour in the twenty-first century. But can the mainline denominations that oppose the experiment being conducted during Special Religious Education (SRE) time in Term 2, 2010, justify their claim to have an influential voice in this conversation?

The Catholic Church, for example, is a member of the Inter-church Commission on Religious Education in Schools and as such demands a say in the ethics debate. **The Bishop of Wollongong, speaking on behalf of the Catholic bishops of NSW, claims the right, as the major contributor in the provision of religious instruction in state schools, to be included in the “debate about the place, design and evaluation of ethics courses”.**

There is obvious sense in having full community involvement in the design of ethics courses. Is it appropriate however to

yield the right to religious denominations to have a final say on whether or not to locate an ethics course within the school curriculum, much less in evaluating it, just because they teach scripture? The NSW Catholic bishops want to be assured that an Ethics Course will not denigrate faith traditions and that it will not compete with SRE. Contrary to what the bishops claim, the “problem” is not the mismanagement of children who opt out of traditional SRE on scripture day. It is the fact that increasing numbers of parents are finding that much of the current SRE teaching is unsatisfactory. Parents who support their children absenting themselves from scripture are seeking an option which will in effect definitely compete with the traditional classes, and which may fly in the face of some of the moral bases taught in those traditional classes. It is no wonder the church is kicking up a fuss, and claiming the higher moral ground from which to censure and control such a movement!

**It is important to recognise that there is a growing constituency of progressive Christian and progressive non-Christian parents.** These parents do not want the Bible to be used in NSW schools as the touchstone for the ethical behaviour of their children, much less some of the doctrines and dogmas of the mainline denominations, and fundamentalist religious groups. There is an alternative in a more realistic and up-to-date approach to the process which it seems is being pursued by the St. James Ethics Centre. **No church has the right to interfere with this positive alternative, any more than it has the right to pontificate about what another denomination teaches in its scripture classes.**

Eric is Co-ordinator of the Centre for Progressive Religious Thought (CPRT – Freedom to Explore). The Ethics conference is still being planned.

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## BEING THANKFUL

A Rabbi said to a precocious six-year-old boy, 'So your mother says your prayers for you each night? That's very commendable. What does she say?'

The little boy replied, 'Thank God he's in bed!'

**Contributed by Candace Parks**

## Overseas U and UU News

### Unitarian Free Health Clinic

Villagers from over six villages availed themselves of a free checkup and medicines at a clinic provided by the Unitarian Union of North East India. In her introductory speech Dr. Creamlimon Nongbri, Secretary of the Seng Kynthei Unitarian Union North East India, said that the camp was an effort by the Meghalaya chapter to address the four important issues prioritized during the last Convocation of the consortium which was held last summer at Houston. The issues are Education, Health, Domestic violence against women and Poverty. Dr Nongbri also said that this was the fifth medical camp organized by the Women's wing of the Unitarian Church in Meghalaya. Earlier the women's association had organized a health camp at Dienglieng village in EK hills district, another camp was held at Kyrdem Mawblang village of Ribhoi District, an eye checkup camp was also organized at Nongkrem village in EKH district in collaboration with the Bawri Nethralaya, Shillong and a special medical checkup was also organized by the women's group at the Annie Margaret Barr Children's village, Kharang, for the 42 orphans who live in this Unitarian orphanage.

Speaking at the inaugural function of the camp, local MLA and Parliamentary Secretary in charge of the border area Lakhmen Rymbui said that the need for such camp was to raise the level of awareness on the importance of healthy living among the villagers and also to provide the much needed health related information about the various schemes and projects of the state and central government for the villagers. He added that the government has recently started a mobile cancer unit and health insurance for the welfare of the poor section of the society. The chief guest also urged upon the villagers to have a planned family where parents can provide proper health and good education for their kids.

### An Evening with Bishop Christopher Senyonjo

The Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office hosted a wine and hors d'oeuvres occasion to honour Bishop Christopher Senyonjo, often referred to as the Desmond Tutu of Uganda, an outspoken advocate for the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual

and transgender people.

Bishop Christopher Senyonjo has taken great risks in defense of LGBT people in his country, where lawmakers are considering an "Anti-Homosexuality Bill," which - if it becomes law - could lead to Bishop Christopher's imprisonment for his support of the LGBT community. In 2006, he was expelled from the Anglican Church of Uganda. Instead of bowing to church intimidation, his courageous response has been to speak out even more strongly for LGBT people as the tide of persecution is rising. Bishop Christopher believes the bill is not only a violation of human rights, but also a violation of the sacred bonds of the Ugandan extended family, or ubuntu, which means people are truly human only when they affirm the humanity of others.

A Donation \$100 (US) was suggested by the organisers. Proceeds went to support the work of Bishop Christopher, Ugandan LGBT human rights defenders, and the LGBT Human Rights program of the Unitarian Universalist UN Office.

"So we pray as time goes on, that human beings should realize that it isn't war which is going to bring real peace in the world--this is my conviction. And this is why I have stood firm on the side of those who are being oppressed. That meant a lot of suffering, but I feel happy deep down inside, because love to me is the key to the human goal."-Bishop Christopher Senyonjo.

The Bill, which has been condemned by President Obama amongst others around the world, seems to have been shelved as of 7th May.

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**Save this date:**

**18th July: Yulefest**

**at Candace's**

## Jottings from the Pews

Helen Whatmough

GINNA has a new granddaughter - Hazel Maeve McDonald - and all went well. Ginna now preparing for a 'round the world trip' at the end of June.

Janet to Hawaii on 18 June to meet with her parents for annual visit.

Colin and Helen returned from Fiji cruise - to Sydney's winter!

### Regular lunch third Sunday of the month - all welcome.

*If you have a news item or written article you believe would be of interest to the congregation, we invite you to submit it for publication.*

**Please note that Esprit is assembled usually in the last week of the month so longer items should be handed in or sent by the second last Sunday of the month. Items for the Schedule of Services (talk titles etc) should be in by the Friday of the last week. Variations to this timetable may be necessitated by circumstances.**

Preferred method is as an MS-WORD or email to [jtendys@bigpond.com](mailto:jtendys@bigpond.com)  
Hardcopy (or electronic media) submissions can be hand-delivered to Jan or posted to:

Spirit of Life  
PO Box 1356  
LANE COVE NSW 1595

Please note:  
If space is limited, submissions may be subject to editing.

### **Do you have a topic of a spiritual nature that you would like to share with the congregation?**

As Unitarians, we support an "Open Pulpit" and invite members of the congregation to lead the service if they so wish.

### **Just let Candace know what you would like to speak about and when you are available and we will fit you into the schedule.**

Also, please feel free to give us your feedback on any of the services.

This is the best way to ensure the services address the needs of the congregation.

**Would you care to join us? Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter.** If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring 9428-2244, consult our website [www.sydneyunitarians.com](http://www.sydneyunitarians.com) or speak to one of our members at the Sunday service. Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee.