



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship

Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli
(near Milsons Point Station)

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Schedule of Services

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

3 May, Rev. Geoff Usher, "Worship, World and Wonder."

We Unitarians have been taught to emphasise the reasonable, the provable, the rational, the functional. Albert Einstein wrote: "He who can no longer stand rapt in wonder and awe is as good as dead. His eyes are closed." And William Blake wrote: "If the doors of perception are opened, then everything will appear as it is, infinite."

In life, in nature, in worship: there are insights to be had, but they cannot always be had by trying to go and get them. Sometimes they come from quiet waiting. Meister Eckhart is said to have observed that nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness.

10 May, Mothers' Day. Morandir Armson "The Pagan Trinity - Thoughts on the Triple-Goddess".

"The Triple-Goddess is one of the most enduring deity figures in modern Paganism; an amalgamated, three-faced goddess, comprising Maiden, Mother, and Crone. To many Pagans, this figure is the essential Goddess, whose existence is unquestioned. But where did this goddess-figure come from, and what is its cultic function? This talk will focus on the figure of the Triple Goddess and seek to answer the question; whose Mother are we talking about here?"

17 May, Colin Whatmough, " Rich Land, Wasteland : how Coal is killing Australia".

24 May, Helen Whatmough "Astrology"

31 May, Dr Max Lawson "Walden Pond and Thoreau "

Looking at Thoreau's writings about living for two years in isolation beside Walden Pond, the reflections made and its influence on Transcendentalism, something very big in our Unitarian tradition.

From AGM 2014, the President's Report

Yesterday in an inspired moment I wrote 90% of the president's report I was going to read to you today. Unfortunately the inspired moment neglected to press the "save" button, so I am now going to present you with something perhaps less inspired, though blessedly shorter.

As this is my last President's report I first wish to comment on our UU faith.

According to the ANZUUA Website the religion known as Unitarian Universalist has two roots in language. Unitarian – as in unite or bring together
Universalist – as in universal or as shared by all

Hence our faith is about uniting people with diverse beliefs around shared universal values. In our SOL Fellowship we are a part of a much larger organization of U and UU churches around the world. Our religion has its own traditions and principles, but does not hold a dogma. Our religion has its own traditional symbols, parts of service and music to use as guidelines, but the possibilities for worship are infinite.

Dick Skut put it this way:

I am a Unitarian Universalist because I am –
Free to decide my own beliefs and to change them if I choose
Free of creeds
Free to live this life fully instead of wishful thinking about the next one
Free to live a moral life because it is the right thing to do, not because of a reward or punishment
Free to enjoy the benefits of a safe community of others with similar feelings
Free to be agnostic
Free to admit "I don't know"

And this is why we come back Sunday after Sunday.
To the outsider who visits our little group, we

may appear to be a rather left winged group of oldies who enjoy sharing coffee together on Sunday mornings. Sad, but this can be our first impression. However, we certainly are so much more.



Here at Spirit of Life we are a fellowship of people dedicated to understanding our world, being bearers of love and progress in our world, and people who stand on the side of democracy and freedom of thought and speech. We are people willing to share our own spiritual journeys. We don't need promises of everlasting life to live de-

cent loving, moral lives. I believe that each and every person who attends our congregation regularly does indeed do this. We also acknowledge that we can't do it alone. We need one another! We love one another.

Together we travel a fascinating road Sunday to Sunday. Interesting, informative and inspiring talks stimulate us. Sharing our joys and concerns helps to make our burdens lighter. Even the singing and the readings and the after service coffee enrich us on our spiritual journeys through life. I believe that though we may be small, we have something powerful here, something worth preserving, and something worth maintaining for others to share in the future.

Most of us came to UU via other faith traditions, that we either grew out of, grew disillusioned with, or felt stifled in. No matter what happened in our previous faith experiences, what is most important is what we experience here "in the now" in our Fellowship.

Above all, UU offers us the strength and solace that comes from our core values of mutual love and respect, freedom of choice in belief, and respect for our earth. While freeing, it is also a huge responsibility that each and every one of us take.

I urge us not to forget what unites us in our Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship. It is worth-

-while, and worth holding on to into the future for others to come to know and be inspired by.

I have found the office of President to be something somewhat alien to my nature. I'm not a "board sort of person". Rules, regulations, procedures of meetings do not inspire me. However, I held on to the position to see us through the transition from Candace's time as President to the future. That, I felt, was important. Unfortunately it is just getting harder and harder for me to get here every Sunday.

We would not be here were it not for the hard working members of the committee. This year we have had to make some tough decisions, and had robust discussions around them. But democracy held her head high and we plowed on.

I would like to thank each and every member of the committee for their work, interest, and contribution to making our little community work.

I particularly wish to thank Jan Tendys who is like the foundation rock of our group. Without bringing attention to herself, Jan has been the minutes secretary, bearer of Morning tea each week, and editor of our increasingly interesting magazine Esprit. I'm sure that poor Jan will be reminding us on the way to her own funeral to "get our 'blurbs' in on time!" Jan also keeps us abreast on so many issues she researches on the web, and she also manages our web site. Jan, you are indeed one fine, efficient and lovely person whose friendship I truly value.

Carolyn Donnelly has proven to be a terrier in getting our speakers organized, a very difficult job. Our services offer such a range of information, idea sharing and inspiration all thanks to Caz's persistence. She also lovingly adds to our morning tea. Caz and her husband Peter are great at getting here early and setting up the room for worship. And Peter has become a very able "Mr. Music" administrator. Both have contributed a great deal to our committee meetings – both in good sense and in enthusiasm. Thank you Peter and Carolyn.

Helen has been a most able Vice President. Her wisdom, good sense and intelligence have kept us on a steady course. Thank you Helen.

Geoff has been the most able treasurer I've EVER seen – even without computerised spread sheets! Every monthly and annual report is perfectly tallied and presented. Geoff takes care of membership, money, administrative details like our registration papers (which would send me to the loony bin!) all efficiently executed. As our associate minister Geoff does double duty by his inspiring sermons as well. Thank you Geoffrey!

Ross and Martin have been interested and helpful committee members – and without them we would cease to be. Thank you gentlemen. I hope that our "youngster" Martin will feel inspired to devote more time and inspiration to our group for many years to come

We have had the recent sad news of the death of Rev. Webster, one of our founding fathers, and have sent our condolences to Vina. In addition we have shared with Candace the loss of her dad Dwayne Parks.

We have enjoyed having Susan and Tom as a part of our community when they are visiting here – escaping Vermont's winters. We feel honoured that you keep returning to us. Thank you! We have enjoyed many visitors. Some come for awhile and go, others come intermittently, but all enrich us.

I would like to thank everyone for the love and support I have received over the years at Spirit of Life. Even though I cannot come every Sunday any more, my heart is here 365 days of the year. A person who manages to live with love and respect for others is blessed, a saint perhaps. But when love and respect for others is shared in a group such as ours, the results multiply in endless possibilities.

Blessed Be. And bless you all!

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**I'm sure everyone will join with me in a hearty "Thank YOU" to Ginna, who has**

always been generous in her time, her thoughtfulness to each of us and her commitment. We certainly hope that she and Max will grace us with their presence for a long time to come. *JT*

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Eating in the 50s

Pasta was not eaten in Australia.
Curry was a surname.
A takeaway was a mathematical problem.
A pizza was something to do with a leaning tower.
All potato chips were plain; the only choice we had was whether to put the salt on or not.
Rice was only eaten as a milk pudding.
Calamari was called squid and we used it as fish bait.
A Big Mac was what we wore when it was raining.
Brown bread was something only poor people ate.
Oil was for lubricating, fat was for cooking.
Tea was made in a teapot using tea leaves and never green.
Sugar enjoyed a good press in those days, and was regarded as being white gold.

Cubed sugar was regarded as posh.
Fish didn't have fingers in those days.
Eating raw fish was called poverty, not sushi.
None of us had ever heard of yoghurt.
Healthy food consisted of anything edible.
People who didn't peel potatoes were regarded as lazy.
Indian restaurants were only found in India.
Cooking outside was called camping.
Seaweed was not a recognized food.
"Kebab" was not even a word, never mind a food.
Prunes were medicinal.
Surprisingly, muesli was readily available, it was called cattle feed.
Water came out of the tap.
If someone had suggested bottling it and charging more than petrol for it, they would have become a laughing stock!!

The one thing that we never ever had on our table in the fifties "Elbows Or Phones."

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**(Not quite true. My mother cooked curry & gave us kids brown - wholemeal -**

**bread in the 50's. What do other oldies remember? *JT*)**

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The Destruction of Nimrud

YOU don't have to be a historian or an archaeologist to feel anger and despair at the destruction of Nimrud, ancient capital of Assyria, by the self-styled Islamic State. UNESCO director-general Irina Bokova has described it as a "war crime". It feels like a crime against humanity.

From NewScientist www.newscientist.com/issue/3012

Comment by Lev Lafayette

Apparently religious fundamentalists learned something from the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution". If you want to fundamentally change a society, destroy its aesthetic and moral history.

Mind you this is hardly new.. The Mongol's destruction of Baghdad's House of Wisdom in 1258, the burning of books and burying alive of scholars by the first Qin Emperor in 213 BCE, the destruction of codices by the Aztec Emperor in c1440, the notorious Nazi Book Burnings of the 1930s & etc.

In passing, a less well known example of iconoclasm was the edict of Roman emperor Saint Constantine issued on non-trinitarian Arians which included systematic book burning:

"In addition, if any writing composed by Arius should be found, it should be handed over to the flames, so that not only will the wickedness of his teaching be obliterated, but nothing will be left even to remind anyone of him. And I hereby make a public order, that if someone should be discovered to have hidden a writing composed by Arius, and not to have immediately brought it forward and destroyed it by fire, his penalty shall be death. As soon as he is discovered in this offense, he shall be submitted for capital punishment."

Amazing how scared people are of ideas and symbols that they have to react in such a fashion in order to protect their equally pathetic grasping to power...

Lev is a member of the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church.

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## To frack or not to frack?

***Both US shale gas and Australian coal seam gas may be subject to the process called "fracking" to retrieve the methane gas used for energy. The article below (written by Brad Plumer for Vox) tackles this question as it is manifested in the United States. In Australia a similar debate is in progress, one difference being that we do not have an organisation quite like the US Environmental Defense Fund.***

Few things have inspired angst among green groups and climate advocates like the question of how to deal with fracking. It's been one of the more important discussions within environmentalism over the last few years.

Here's a very rough breakdown of the debate: Supporters of fracking point out that the US natural-gas boom, driven by hydraulic fracturing, has actually been one of the big environmental success stories of the past decade. Electric utilities are now using more cheap gas and less dirty coal to generate power. Since gas burns more cleanly, that curbs air pollution: US carbon dioxide emissions have plunged roughly 10 percent since 2005.

That, in turn, has given momentum to President Obama's big push to tackle global warming and curtail power plant emissions further via EPA regulations. "You have to ask," Michael Levi of the Council on Foreign Relations told me last fall "does the emergence of a cheap, reliable option for cutting emissions make regulators more willing to force power plants to cut their emissions? And the answer is yes. We're seeing that play out."

Green-minded supporters of fracking usually concede that there are real problems with the practice — like water pollution — but they often focus more on patching those problems

than on banning it altogether. Advocates of this approach include the Environmental Defense Fund, as well as, crucially, the Obama administration.

On the "anti" side, meanwhile, are a large and growing set of environmentalists who now argue that the problems with fracking outweigh the benefits. It's not just the air and water pollution caused by fracking. They also point out that there's methane leaking out of all those gas wells and pipelines. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas, and depending on how big those leaks are, they could offset the climate benefits of lower CO2 emissions.

Just as significantly, those more skeptical of fracking point out that natural gas is still a fossil fuel and produces carbon dioxide when burned (even if it's only half as much as coal). And if we want to avoid drastic global warming, we'll need to phase out most or all fossil fuels very soon. These groups are less keen on Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz's suggestion that natural gas can be a "bridge" to a cleaner future. They don't see gas as helping us move away from coal. They see cheap gas as hampering the transition to renewable sources like wind and solar.

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The article went on to say that the Environmental Defence Fund was undertaking research to establish just how much methane was released by fracking wells. Even this, despite independent scientists, has led to controversy as to the degree of involvement of the gas companies. JT

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## Earth Day

**From Unitarian Universalist Association (US):**

Over the course of this month, spiritual leaders have led us through a transformative process. We have connected with our love for Earth, reckoned with the great loss we are experiencing, reconciled with our current reality while remembering the joy of being alive, and committed ourselves to serious action to save our planet and ourselves.

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Definition of religion in Australia

From the Australian Bureau of Statistics:

Precise definition of the concept of religion, or of what generally constitutes 'a religion', is difficult, if not impossible, because of the intangible and wide-ranging nature of the topic. Generally, a religion is regarded as a set of beliefs and practices, usually involving acknowledgment of a divine or higher being or power, by which people order the conduct of their lives both practically and in a moral sense. This method of defining religion in terms of a mixture of beliefs, practices, and a Supernatural Being giving form and meaning to existence was used by the High Court of Australia in 1983. The High Court held that "the beliefs, practices and observances of the Church of the New Faith (Scientology) were a religion in Victoria". As part of the ruling, it was stated that:

"For the purposes of the law, the criteria of religion are twofold:

first, belief in a Supernatural Being, Thing or Principle; and

second, the acceptance of canons of conduct in order to give effect to that belief, though canons of conduct which offend against the ordinary laws are outside the area of any immunity, privilege or right conferred on the grounds of religion."

Although the above definition may be regarded as useful in going some way toward describing the nature of the entities included in the classification, it is by no means all-inclusive. Some of the entities included in the classification do not fit the definition, but are regarded, either universally or widely, as religions. Such entities are included to ensure that the classification is comprehensive and useful, and to make the classification widely acceptable.

For instance, Buddhism is universally accepted as a religion although it does not acknowledge a personal God. Similarly, Confucianism is regarded as a religion, even though it involves no belief in the supernatural, because it provides the moral code of its adher-

ents. However, not all philosophies which involve beliefs about the nature of life or codes of behaviour are accepted as religions. For instance, Marxism is regarded as a religion by some because it is based on a coherent set of beliefs, but it is more generally regarded as a political philosophy and is, therefore, excluded from the classification.

Thus, the extent of opinion in regard to what constitutes a 'religion' (particularly the opinion of the adherents), practical considerations, and generally-held notions about the nature of philosophies, organisations and institutions all play a role in defining religion or identifying the concepts that underpin religion. These elements complement the more stringent notions of belief, practices and a Supernatural Being included in the definition of religion.

Read more at:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/775012EF0058A77DCA25697E00184BDC?opendocument>

If the (internet) Church of the Little Pony wanted to become a recognised religion in Australia, it would have to show it had a certain number of adherents - some decades ago that was about 150 - meeting in a number of congregations.

Humanism is not regarded as a religion in Australia but a Unitarian humanist would be regarded as having a religion (Unitarianism) because Unitarians have been accepted as a religion since quite early in colonial times. JT

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**Quotes: Frans de Waal, ethologist**

"Atheism will need to be combined with something else, something more constructive than its opposition to religion, to be relevant to our lives. The only possibility is to embrace morality as natural to our species."

"The possibility that empathy resides in parts of the brain so ancient that we share them with rats should give pause to anyone comparing politicians with those poor, underestimated creatures."

## **“The citizen’s first duty is not to keep quiet.”**

Don’t mourn for **Günter Grass**! Eat and drink for him, pork belly and black lentils and golden Westphalian beer. And then remember somebody else who can never die, and who seems now to stand for so much of Grass’s lust for real, bad-smelling, defiant life.

I mean his character Tulla Pokriefke, first met in Cat and Mouse and last seen in Crabwalk, his final novel. She starts as a scabby, dirty-minded teenager in wartime Danzig, who gets conscripted as a tram conductor. She ends up as an insufferable old matriarch in East Germany, suspect to everyone for speaking her mind, for blubbing over Stalin’s death and yet loudly defending the Nazi “Strength Through Joy” cruises for working-class families. Somebody in Crabwalk says: “That’s always been Tulla’s way. She says things other people don’t wish to hear. Of course she sometimes exaggerates just a bit.”

Grass kept saying things other people didn’t wish to hear, and sometimes exaggerated a bit. He broke Germany’s silences about its past, not just what Nazi Germans had done to others but – almost equally repressed – what the German people had suffered themselves during and after the Third Reich. His breakthrough novel The Tin Drum (1959) appalled and fascinated the nation, not because it showed the tragedy of how a whole people had surrendered to Hitler but because it showed the farce, the grotesque and grisly comedy of that surrender.

Foreigners – not Germans – came to call him “the conscience of the nation”. Grass was never that. He never missed a chance to upbraid his fellow countrymen for complacency, cowardice or inattention to the past. But in reality he was a connoisseur of compromise. His Danzig family background was the Kaszub (Slavic) minority, one of those communities that answers “Who are you?” with “Who’s asking?”. As a boy, Grass was an unthinking true believer in Hitler’s Reich. It was only after the war that he began to feel that getting by and letting be might be more noble

than flaming faith.

When I first saw him, an un-German figure with his black whiskers and sharp black eyes, he was leading a march to demand the overthrow of the Springer Press empire. Then I came across him in his “Bus Party” – his attempt to smash open the nervous smugness of a West German election campaign by taking a coach-load of urban intellectuals round the small towns to preach disrespect and ask people what they really wanted..... In those days, he was a non-party Social Democrat (SPD). His friend Willy Brandt privately loved his attacks on the inhibitions and repressions of the Bonn republic, but wouldn’t say so openly. When the SPD made yet another shaming mistake, people would say: Scheisse! Trotzdem – SPD! (“Oh shit! But in spite of that, SPD ...”) That was Grass’s motto too. In From the Diary of a Snail, he argued fiercely for the SPD’s step-by-painful-step progress, as opposed to instant revolution. Dürer’s ‘Melancholia’, sulking over yet another failed plan, was his pin-up girl.....

As years passed, the world admired him more and his own people less. Conservative nationalists, still smarting from The Tin Drum, took the chance to savage him when in 1990 he declared that the reunification of Germany was a fatal mistake – a hubristic Anschluss that would end badly. The king of critics, Marcel Reich-Ranicki, murdered his later novels. Then, in 2006, he revealed that he had served briefly in the Waffen-SS, and his enemies pounced. The uproar was absurd. He had been a 17-year-old schoolboy conscripted into the unit, like thousands of others. Had he admitted this 40 years earlier, nobody would have cared. But by hiding it, while reproving others for concealing their pasts, he brought a storm of synthetic outrage on his own head.

His creativity – fiction, poetry, marvellous graphic art and sculpture – was vast.....Because of him, people are more ready to hear what they don’t want to hear. But whose voice will say it now?

***The above is part of an article by Neal Ascherson in The Guardian***

**You have mail:** As the only child of parents who said no to vaccination, I suffered from being sent home from school because I had whooping cough.

I also had chicken pox, mumps and measles quite severely. I do not know if I ever had rubella.

My early childhood was miserable, feeling sick and having to miss school, which I loved. So, parents who say no, keep in mind how much suffering you may inflict on a child.

My own children were protected, I made sure of that, but I had to catch up with various vaccinations as an adult.

**Name supplied** From The Age letters

This morning Mark Pearson, Secretary of the **Animal Justice Party** (and Executive Director of Animal Liberation NSW) became the 21st member elected to the NSW Legislative Council.

After the federal election in 2013 an independent elections expert predicted that the AJP would be in a house in an Australian parliament within three elections. This is the second election fought since then. So, what a result in a little over eighteen months and a budget of \$12,000, with a whole load of passion and hard work by many.

A paw/hoof/claw and voice in politics at last. Woohoo!!!

**Christina Hart**, ex-member SUC

## Thus Spake Spike Milligan

"All I ask is the chance to prove that money can't make me happy."

"Contraceptives should be used on every conceivable occasion."

"I'm not afraid of dying, I just don't want to be there when it happens."

"I'm a hero with coward's legs."

General: Where are you from?

Spike: London.

General: Which part?

Spike: ... Well, all of me.

"Are you going to come quietly, or do I have to use earplugs?"

"I turned and rubbed my hands with glee. I always keep a tin of glee handy."

"All men are cremated equal."

"Money couldn't buy friends, but you got a better class of enemy."

**Comedian, bipolar sufferer, Spike Milligan was born on April 16, 1918, Died in February, 2002.**

## Would you care to join Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship?

**Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter.** Full membership \$50 concession \$20. If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring **0466 940 461** or consult our website [www.sydneyunitarians.org](http://www.sydneyunitarians.org). Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher or Ginna Hastings for an application form at the Sunday service.

**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 Esprit.** It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Esprit editor by the 15th of each month: [jtendys@yahoo.com.au](mailto:jtendys@yahoo.com.au) or hand to Jan Tendys at the Sunday service.

Although we have an Associate Minister, Rev. Geoff Usher, we are primarily a lay-led congregation. **Perhaps you have a topic to share?** We welcome any topic ideas, offers to speak or names of suitable speakers for our meetings whom we could approach. *Please see Caz Donnelly at the Sunday service.*

**Fellowship contact 0466 940 461**