



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship
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Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
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Schedule of Services

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

28th August **Group discussion** **“The moral decay of our society is as bad at the top as the bottom.”**
(See p. 6)

4 September **Rev. Dr. Ian Ellis-Jones** **Is Buddhism Atheistic?**

Many people, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, assert that Buddhism is 'atheistic' - that is, it is a belief-system which denies the existence of God. The address will seek to verify whether that assertion is correct.

11 September **Eric Stevenson** **“Hoping my way to Meaning”**

Hope has always been born out of a life experience of powerlessness or personal inadequacy and desperation. Some religions exploit that weakness and poverty and reckless state of mind. They then prescribe a heavenly remedy which you can hope to achieve. But for some of us, that hope is forlorn and meaningless. Given that some kind of hope is essential to sustain us on our spiritual journey, what is it in this present life to which we can reasonably aspire?

18 September **Martin Horlacher** **"The Beekeeper's Lament"**

All too often in all our lives, we lose something. And, just as often, no one can give you back what you've lost. But, whether in this life or in any other, nobody has to go it alone.

25 September **Rev. Geoff Usher** **“Rabindranath Tagore: a vision of humanity in harmony with Planet Earth.”**

Rabindranath Tagore was born in Calcutta in 1861. His first book, a collection of poems, was published when he was 17, and he became a writer of both prose and poetry in his own language and in English, and in 1913 was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. When he died at the age of 80 an incomplete collection of his works filled 30 substantial volumes. Unitarians particularly remember Tagore for his liberal and inclusive ideas.

2nd October **Peter Berry** **“The Courage to Be”**

This talk will be based on the book by Paul Tillich (1952) about our need to be brave in the face of all life may present to us, including all its difficulties.

The Centre for Progressive Religious Thought in conjunction with Amnesty International and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Choir will present:

A FRIDAY NIGHT CHARITY CONCERT WITH MARGARET MAYMAN

7.30 for 8 pm, **October 21 in the Pitt Street Uniting Church**

At this event Dr. Mayman will speak on the subject, **“Safe Spirituality in a Sex-Phobic Church”** Proceeds will be donated to international human rights groups. Admission: Donation to Amnesty International. **RSVP: cprtfreedomtoexplore@yahoo.com.au or 02-98885361.**



The Centre for Progressive Religious Thought in conjunction with Australian Reforming Catholics presents:

HEADS, HEARTS AND HANDS

A Sydney Conference Linking Progressive Religion with Practical Compassionate Action

1 pm to 4 pm, Saturday, October 22 in Pitt St Uniting Church

“The work of deconstructing the inherited theology has provided a crucial foundation for progressives but progressive Christianity differs from liberalism and secular Christianity in its recovery of spiritual practices which empower the living out of the ethic of Jesus. If progressive theology is to be more than “right thinking” or a new theological orthodoxy, it needs to engage deeply with Liberation Theology and to take seriously the claim that another world is possible”, says **MARGARET MAYMAN** Keynote Speaker with **VAL WEBB** who will present Florence Nightingale as a Feminist Liberation Theologian before her time who offered “a new religion” for the poor which challenged the belief that God ordained us rich or poor. Although immortalised as “The Lady with the Lamp”, it is time to take that lamp and properly illuminate this brilliant woman mystic who

advocated reform for the poor and women’s rights, changing Victorian England.

Has Liberation Theology Something to Teach Us About How to Go About Doing Good?

In their visit to our Sydney Conference Drs. Margaret Mayman and Val Webb will bring with them a challenge. ***It is to include in our thinking, ways in which progressive religion can best express and maintain the unquestioned humanitarianism of traditional faith communities without dependence on the supernatural or upon a system of divine reward and retribution.*** We are deeply grateful to them for reminding us progressives of our responsibility to review our emergent belief systems in the light of wisdom gleaned from the history of altruism in religion and society.

PRE-CONFERENCE BOOKINGS \$15.00

Entrance Admission \$20.00

Mailing address for Early Registrations: CPRT, 22 Badajoz Road Ryde, 2112, For B-Pay or EFT Banking: The Centre for Progressive Religious Thought. BSB 082 155 A/c no. 83 243 0417. Cheques to: CPRT Freedom to Explore

This is a Conference for all those who are concerned for the plight of the under privileged, the stigmatised and the needy. It will question whether the origin, motivation and pursuit of such altruistic activity is necessarily linked to a pre-modern world view and belief in a personal God. The Centre for Progressive Religious Thought offers unfailing philosophical support and inclusiveness to our members who are raising such questions and who in their unique and different ways choose to campaign for human rights and compassion for humanity.

Dr. Val Webb is author of “Florence Nightingale – The Making of a Radical Theologian”, and “Stepping out with the Sacred: Human Attempts to Engage the Divine”. Dr. Webb is a teacher, artist, scientist and theologian. **Rev. Dr. Margaret Mayman** is the minister of St. Andrews on the Terrace in Wellington, NZ. She is a graduate in political science and religion; she also holds a B.Theol. degree, STM and M Phil. degrees in Christian Ethics, and was awarded her PhD in 2001.

The Russell Family

From the Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography, an on line resource of the Unitarian Universalist Historical Society

Lady Frances Russell, who became a Unitarian at 70, and her grandson, Bertrand Russell, Unitarian until age 15, were members of a British family long prominent in reform politics. Although Lady Frances's husband, Lord John Russell, was never a Unitarian, from 1859-73 he regularly attended the preaching of James Martineau and, in his Whig (Liberal) political career, he had a considerable impact on the history of Unitarianism in Britain. Bertrand Russell, after he had rejected Unitarianism, influenced many Unitarians, particularly Humanists. He was president of the Rationalist Press Association, 1955-70, and belonged to the British Humanist Advisory Council. Bertrand's uncle, Francis Russell, wrote Unitarian hymns and verse.

Lord John Russell, later Earl Russell (1792-1878) was throughout his political career an ardent reformer and promoter of civil and religious liberty. He served as prime minister 1846-52 and 1865-66 and was twice a member of the cabinet under other prime ministers. As leader of the Whig party, he was most responsible for changing its name to the Liberal Party. He was instrumental in passage of the Reform Act of 1832, the first modern attempt to make parliament more representative. During his administration the Factory Act of 1847 limited the working day of women and children to ten hours.

A staunch broad church Anglican, Russell believed the best way to preserve the established Church of England was to remove legal disabilities for other forms of religion. **He spearheaded repeal of the Test Acts in 1828 and 1863 which removed restrictions on Unitarians and other Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England; secured passage of the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829 which granted legal toleration to Roman Catholics; and for a decade continued to introduce legislation removing Jewish legal disabilities. The Jewish Relief Act was finally passed in 1858.** Lord

Russell's tolerance of competition to the established church had its limits, however: in 1850 he opposed reestablishment of Roman Catholic bishoprics in Britain.

Russell wrote a bill passed in 1836 legalizing the marriages of Dissenters in their own chapels. He also made a notable speech in favour of the Dissenter's Chapel Bill of 1844. This act aided Unitarians by establishing their title to chapels and trust funds, long in their possession, against the legal claims of orthodox dissenters. In 1878, near the end of his life, a delegation of dissenters, including two Unitarians, presented Russell with an address commemorating "his life long advocacy of religious freedom."

Lady Frances Anna Maria Elliot Russell, later Countess Russell (November 15, 1814-January 17, 1898) was second wife of Lord John Russell. The couple had four children. Lady Frances also inherited the care of her husband's children from his earlier marriage. She experienced childbearing and nurture as a great sacrifice. The eldest of her children died in young adulthood. The other three were either mentally ill or incapacitated as adults. Nevertheless, according to her grandson, she faced the challenges and tragedies of her family life with courage and "never lost a certain kind of gaiety." After the deaths of her son and daughter-in-law, Viscount John and Viscountess Kate Amberley, she raised their two sons, the younger of whom was the philosopher and author, Bertrand Russell.

Although Lord John was nearly twice her age when they were married in 1841, Lady Russell imposed her own austere lifestyle on her husband. She was shy and serious. Despite her deficiencies as a political hostess, she was ambitious for her husband. She urged him to become "the head of the most moral and religious government" Britain had ever had. Her influence on Lord John caused him to consider diverse interests and therefore made him less decisive than he had been. Displeased with this alteration in their leader, his Liberal colleagues named her "Deadly Nightshade."

Lady Russell's political ideas were more radical than her husband's. She opposed Britain's imperialist wars, supported Irish Home Rule, and advocated abolition of the House of Lords. She favoured abolition of the teaching of relig-

ion in tax-supported schools.

Highly cultured, Lady Russell read French, German, and Italian. She was a friend of Unitarian authors and poets, Charles Dickens, James Russell Lowell, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The latter, she felt particularly, had a "spiritual nature." She commemorated family events with her own poetry.

Raised a Scottish Presbyterian, she became a Unitarian in 1884. Reading the Life of William Ellery Channing, she found it "interesting in the highest degree—an echo of all those high and noble thoughts of which this earth is not yet worthy, but which I firmly believe will one day reign on it supreme." She also read many of James Martineau's works. At one time she hoped that her grandson Bertrand would become a Unitarian minister.

Lady Russell's religion was practical, based on conscience rather than mystical experience. She believed in a loving, personal God, petitionary prayer, immortality, conscience, and free will. She despised "thoughtless conformity." In 1876 she published Family Worship, a book of daily prayers and Bible quotations. Her religious writing was later made available in two Unitarian publications, Home Prayers and Bible Readings and Prayers.

Like her husband, Lady Russell considered theology "the greatest enemy of true religion." She often remarked to her grandson Bertrand about metaphysics, "What is mind? No matter. What is matter? Never mind."

Her son, Viscount John Amberley, wrote An Analysis of Religious Belief in which he set forth his belief in a non-personal God. Amberley rejected the divinity of Christ and was critical of the historical Jesus. Though horrified by aspects of the book, Lady Russell, after her son's death, carefully edited and published his book.

As she aged, Lady Russell continued to change her mind about religious matters. **She came to believe that neither the Bible nor any church nor any prophet is infallible. Though she honoured Jesus, she believed that revelation comes directly to the mind and not through a mediator. She visited services of numerous denominations. On occasion she enjoyed silent,**

solitary worship with nature. She favoured the name "Free Church" as representing her broad and tolerant views.

In 1888 Lady Russell helped organize the Unitarian congregation in Richmond, Surrey. Her last public appearance, in 1896, was at the dedication of Channing Hall, built for the Richmond Free Church. A memorial to the Countess was added two years later.

Hon. Francis Albert Rollo Russell (July 11, 1849-March 30, 1914), a meteorologist noted for his study of the worldwide effects of the 1883 volcanic explosion on the Indonesian island of Krakatoa, wrote Unitarian hymns with a scientific flavor.

Francis (called Rollo by the family), third child of Lord John and Lady Francis Russell, was the last child born to a prime minister in office until May 2000. Francis received his A.B. from Christ Church, Oxford in 1873. He served in the British foreign office until failing eyesight forced his resignation. Bertrand Russell said that his uncle was important to him when he was young. Rollo introduced him to eminent scientists and philosophers. While working on the Krakatoa paper Rollo treated Bertrand as though he were a collaborator rather than a child. Bertrand later wrote, "[Uncle Rollo] suffered all his life from a morbid shyness so intense as to prevent him from achieving anything that involved contact with other human beings. But with me, so long as I was a child, he was not shy, and he used to display a vein of droll humour of which adults would not have suspected him."

Rollo and his mother, Countess Russell were members of the committee that founded the Unitarian Christian Church in Richmond in 1888. It is recorded that when the new meeting house, Channing Hall, was opened later that year "Rollo Russell took the chair."

Francis Russell was a Darwinian who believed scientific determinism and free will compatible. His religious verse includes both "Not an atom nor a galaxy of suns, dares lift itself against the word . . . In the universe there is no corner void of law" and "the glorious freedom of will in man." He used biblical meter to write modern psalms referring to atmospheric pressure, atoms, and the now discredited substance, ether "which bearest messages from matter through all creation." His hymns appeared in Break of Day, 1893,

and three -"Christian! Rise and Act thy Creed," "Come, Holy Spirit Kind to All," and "O God, whose Voice the Angels Hear"—were included in Horders Hymns, Supplement, 1894. "Christian Rise and Act thy Creed" also appeared in the American Unitarian Hymns of the Spirit, 1937, and the British Unitarian Hymns of Faith and Freedom, 1991. Eleven of his modern psalms were used in the British Unitarian Psalms and Canticles for Public Worship, 1918, and three of his antiphonal readings were included in Hymns of the Spirit. In addition Russell wrote a Unitarian tract, Religion and Life.

More on Bertrand Russell next *Esprit*.

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## What Price Fame?

Or

### how Hedwig Eisler helped to win the war

Frequently women are not fully recognised for their intellectual achievement. Take **Jocelyn Bell**. She discovered pulsars, but her boss appropriated her work and HE received the Nobel Prize.

A generation earlier, **Lise Meitner** was the first person to deduce the nature of nuclear fission: Otto Hahn nabbed the Nobel for that.

One of **Hedwig Eisler's** talents was for mathematics. It is not generally known that she was one of the authors of the 1942 Patent titled "Social Communication System". This is not in Nobel Prize territory, but her idea was simple and elegant.

If a radio transmitter always uses the same frequency, it is easily subject to interception or jamming. One way to avoid such interference is to hop around a predetermined set of frequencies in an apparently random order, determined by a secret key.

That technology was soon used as a military communication device. So the Allies could well be grateful for the contribution of this famous woman. We knew her as Hedy Lamarr.

**Margaret Armstrong**

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Paper Boats

Day by day I float my paper boats one by one
down the running stream.

In big black letters I write my name on them
and the name of the village where I live.

I hope that someone in some strange land
will find them and know who I am.

I load my little boats with shiuli flowers from
our garden, and hope that these blooms of
the dawn will be carried safely to land in the
night.

I launch my paper boats and look up into the
sky and see the little clouds setting their
white bulging sails.

I know not what playmate of mine in the sky
sends them down the air to race with my
boats!

When night comes I bury my face in my arms
and dream that my paper boats float on and
on under the midnight stars.

The fairies of sleep are sailing in them, and
the lading is their baskets full of dreams.

Rabindranath Tagore

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### Lots of Sorrow and a Little Joy.

Lots of sorrow and a little joy.  
Lots of joy and only a bit  
Of sorrow.  
Who can know  
The formula beforehand?

We don't get to watch  
While it's mixed. No one tells us  
What's in it.  
We lift it  
To our lips - azure elixir  
That burns our throats to crystal.

**Gregory Orr**

## UK Riots—one opinion

David Cameron, Ed Miliband and the entire British political class came together yesterday to denounce the rioters. They were of course right to say that the actions of these looters, arsonists and muggers were abhorrent and criminal, and that the police should be given more support.

But there was also something very phony and hypocritical about all the shock and outrage expressed in parliament. MPs spoke about the week's dreadful events as if they were nothing to do with them.

I cannot accept that this is the case. Indeed, I believe that the criminality in our streets cannot be dissociated from the moral disintegration in the highest ranks of modern British society. The last two decades have seen a terrifying decline in standards among the British governing elite. It has become acceptable for our politicians to lie and to cheat.

### **An almost universal culture of selfishness and greed has grown up.**

It is not just the feral youth of Tottenham who have forgotten they have duties as well as rights. ....

..... A few weeks ago, I noticed an item in a newspaper saying that the business tycoon Sir Richard Branson was thinking of moving his headquarters to Switzerland. This move was represented as a potential blow to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, because it meant less tax revenue.

I couldn't help thinking that in a sane and decent world such a move would be a blow to Sir Richard, not the Chancellor. People would note that a prominent and wealthy businessman was avoiding British tax and think less of him. Instead, he has a knighthood and is widely feted. The same is true of the brilliant retailer Sir Philip Green. Sir Philip's businesses could never survive but for Britain's famous social and political stability, our transport system to shift his goods and our schools to educate his workers.

Yet Sir Philip, who a few years ago sent an extraordinary £1 billion dividend offshore, seems to have little intention of paying for much of this. Why does nobody get angry or hold him culpable? I know that he employs expensive tax lawyers and that everything he does is legal, but he surely faces ethical and

moral questions just as much as does a young thug who breaks into one of Sir Philip's shops and steals from it?

Our politicians – standing sanctimoniously on their hind legs in the Commons yesterday – are just as bad. They have shown themselves prepared to ignore common decency and, in some cases, to break the law. David Cameron is happy to have some of the worst offenders in his Cabinet. Take the example of Francis Maude, who is charged with tackling public sector waste – which trade unions say is a euphemism for waging war on low paid workers. Yet Mr Maude made tens of thousands of pounds by breaching the spirit, though not the law, surrounding MPs' allowances.

A great deal has been made over the past few days of the greed of the rioters for consumer goods, not least by Rotherham MP Denis MacShane who accurately remarked, "What the looters wanted was for a few minutes to enter the world of Sloane Street consumption." This from a man who notoriously claimed £5,900 for eight laptops. Of course, as an MP he obtained these laptops legally through his expenses.

Yesterday, the veteran Labour MP Gerald Kaufman asked the Prime Minister to consider how these rioters can be "reclaimed" by society. Yes, this is indeed the same Gerald Kaufman who submitted a claim for three months' expenses totalling £14,301.60, which included £8,865 for a Bang & Olufsen television.

Or take the Salford MP Hazel Blears, who has been loudly calling for draconian action against the looters. I find it very hard to make any kind of ethical distinction between Blears's expense cheating and tax avoidance, and the straight robbery carried out by the looters.

The Prime Minister showed no sign that he understood that something stank about yesterday's Commons debate. He spoke of morality, but only as something which applies to the very poor: "We will restore a stronger sense of morality and responsibility – in every town, in every street and in every estate." He appeared not to grasp that this should apply to the rich and powerful as well.

The tragic truth is that Mr Cameron is himself guilty of failing this test. It is scarcely six weeks since he jauntily turned up at the

News International summer party, even though the media group was at the time subject to not one but two police investigations. Even more notoriously, he awarded a senior Downing Street job to the former News of the World editor Andy Coulson, even though he knew at the time that Coulson had resigned after criminal acts were committed under his editorship. **The Prime Minister excused his wretched judgment by proclaiming that “everybody deserves a second chance”. It was very telling yesterday that he did not talk of second chances as he pledged exemplary punishment for the rioters and looters.**

These double standards from Downing Street are symptomatic of widespread double standards at the very top of our society. It should be stressed that most people (including, I know, Telegraph readers) continue to believe in honesty, decency, hard work, and putting back into society at least as much as they take out.

But there are those who do not. Certainly, the so-called feral youth seem oblivious to decency and morality. But so are the venal rich and powerful – too many of our bankers, footballers, wealthy businessmen and politicians.

Of course, most of them are smart and wealthy enough to make sure that they obey the law. That cannot be said of the sad young men and women, without hope or aspiration, who have caused such mayhem and chaos over the past few days. But the rioters have this defence: they are just following the example set by senior and respected figures in society. Let's bear in mind that many of the youths in our inner cities have never been trained in decent values. All they have ever known is barbarism. Our politicians and bankers, in sharp contrast, tend to have been to good schools and universities and to have been given every opportunity in life.

**Something has gone horribly wrong in Britain. If we are ever to confront the problems which have been exposed in the past week, it is essential to bear in mind that they do not only exist in inner-city housing estates.**

The culture of greed and impunity we are witnessing on our TV screens stretches right up into corporate boardrooms and the Cabinet. It embraces the police and large

parts of our media. It is not just its damaged youth, but Britain itself that needs a moral reformation.

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The above is taken from the essay: “The moral decay of our society is as bad at the top as the bottom” by Peter Osborne of the Daily Telegraph (UK), August 11, 2011.

Present editor's emphasis.

(Worthy of note is the way people of the affected communities and other UK citizens took to the streets over the next few days to clean up after the rioters. *Other comments please?* JT)

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**Some more of those  
First Grader Proverbs**

An idle mind is... the best way to relax.

Where there's smoke there's... pollution.

Happy the bride who... gets all the presents.

A penny saved is..... not much.

Two's company, three's.... the Musketeers.

Don't put off till tomorrow what... you put on to go to bed.

Laugh and the whole world laughs with you, cry and... you have to blow your nose.

If at first you don't succeed... get new batteries.

You get out of something only what you... see in the picture on the box.

.  
When the blind lead the blind... get out of the way.

A bird in the hand... is going to poop on you.

And the WINNER and last one!

Better late than... pregnant.

**Contributed by both Candace Parks and Caz Donnelly.**

## Jottings

Jan and John recently attended the Australian Festival of Chamber Music in sunny Townsville. Colin and Helen also visiting northern ports on a cruise.

Past weeks - we celebrated with Margaret Hoffmann a significant birthday; also birthday wishes to Candace, Peter D. and Helen.

Catching up with Geoff over lunch at the Kirribilli pub after the service was enjoyed by those who could attend. **Incidentally everyone is welcome to join together for lunch at the pub each month, usually on the third week.**

Ginna and Max are delighted to welcome a beautiful granddaughter, Penny, into the world.

And thanks to Margaret Armstrong for supplying us with avocados over the past months from her tree at home. **Caz Donnelly**

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The human race is faced with a cruel choice: work or daytime television.

From a Uniting Church newsletter, contributed by Geoff Usher .

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
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:

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 or speak to one of our members before or after the Sunday service. Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee.