



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship
PO Box 1356, Lane Cove NSW 1595
Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
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Schedule of Services

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

7 February, Ross McLuckie: "Recognition and Appreciation"

We are all aware of what we do but do we recognise the real meaning of what is happening and see the benefit in it ?

14 February, Laurence Gormley: "Evolution and Valentine's Day"

"This weekend has been designated Evolution weekend by the UU movement in the US. More popularly, today is Valentine's Day. What do these antithetical celebrations have to do with each other"?

21 February, Jan Tendys: "Mindfulness / Reducing Stress"

We will do a mindfulness exercise and talk about stress and ways of reducing it.

28 February, Janet Horton "Finding Meaning in Music"

How our iPods and gadgets can play a part in our search for meaning.

7 March, Candace Parks: "The Power of Connection"

14 March Mary-lou Johnson "Faith and Reason"

21 March Colin Whatmough "Marcus Borg and Liberal Christianity"

28 March Martin Horlacher "A Way of Life"

Give Us Your Thoughts Have you an opinion on Steven Conroy's proposed internet censorship? Haven't made your mind up yet on the pros and cons of this child protection policy and would like to hear the opinions of other SOL members.? Also, what do you think of NSW's anti-bikie law? Severe laws against terrorism—yes, we have to accept that's necessary in today's world. But laws almost as severe against bikies?

Jan Tendys

Marriage Celebration.

Eric Stevenson

It was during my evangelical missionary days in the Papua New Guinea highlands that I began to be disillusioned with the biblical interpretation of marriage. It was 1956 and I was a guest of the local Lutheran congregation. In the surrounding Hagen culture, polygamy was the Stone Age society's welfare benefit for the widows of warriors killed in inter-tribal skirmishes. And it was customary for the brother of the deceased to marry his dead brother's wives. But the Bible said that an elder in a Christian congregation had to be the husband of one wife. In the Mount Hagen church therefore in order to become a deacon a man had to jettison the surplus members of his harem. Because Christian conversion obviously had not completely washed away the human frailties of one successful applicant for the position, guess which of his numerous wives he retained in order to perform his sacred task? The latest model of course!!! *It was left to his heathen brother to do the Christian thing and take in the remaining oldies!!*

That is how the missionary church mismanaged the biblical proscription of polygamy for church officers! But this story leads me to ask how many other biblical prohibitions regarding human relationships need to be compromised or discarded in the interests of truth and justice and, dare I say it, true Christian love?

As a marriage celebrant and a reasonably humanitarian individual I am therefore faced with the challenge of doing a marriage service for which I am not authorised by church or state. I can get away with flouting church regulations, but unfortunately I can't do the legal thing for marriages which are not recognised by law.

So what does one do when the intending couple state honestly and sincerely that they do not want to pledge themselves to each other for life? What does one do if the intending couple agree that there are some future disabilities which they may experience in the other which they are not willing to serve or not capable of living with? What does one do

when the legal spouse is demented and in permanent care and the functioning one wants to re-partner? What does one do when parties of the same sex are in love and who are living together request a consecration of their relationship? What does one do when by mutual agreement both intending partners agree that one is, or both of them are free to find sexual fulfilment with another person? What does one do when there is no mutual agreement and does it matter to the 'adulterous' partner if the innocent partner doesn't know about it, or doesn't want to know about it? What does one do with a 'ménage a trois' which in some cases might be seen as justified because of extenuating circumstances (a la my Hagen story)?

So much for the practical questions confronting the modern day religious celebrant. But what about the theological and philosophical hang ups? *Suppose God is not in the marriage business as traditional liturgies assert! Suppose in the case of Christians, the historical Jesus does not have an ongoing romance with the church! Suppose adult human beings are well able to take full responsibility for co-habiting rather than depending on an outside authority to show them how! Suppose marriage was not necessarily invented so that children can be brought into the world! Suppose there are other models of marriage upon which society can be built on firm foundations! And suppose honouring and obeying the husband is an antiquated biblical injunction! In fact, suppose the sacred scriptures are not the appropriate authority to determine such matters!*

In a lot of these situations, contemporary culture has moved away from the churches and their celebrants so much that civil celebrants are being sought who will nevertheless sanctify a marriage bond even if they are unable to legalise it. As an authorised religious celebrant, and as a member of the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship I want it to be known that I have great sympathy with sincere couples who are wrestling with the above questions and suppositions. **Surely no pair of humans of good will should be refused the opportunity to cement their devotion to each other in their own way**
(next page)

and in accordance with their own beliefs in a public or in a private place of their choosing. As for discriminating against them, maybe the brother of my Lutheran elder friend has something to teach us out of the stone age!!

It is long past time to re-define the concept of marriage and to rewrite the sometimes meaningless phraseology which characterises many church and civil ceremonies. I will leave the revision of the Marriage Act and the Family Law Act to the legal profession.

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## **The 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions**

**Jim Scarfe**

I attended the last three days in Melbourne of the fourth modern Parliament, 3 to 9 December. It was a massive undertaking held in the Exhibition/Convention Centre on three levels.

No statistics are yet available from Chicago H.Q. I've asked Melbourne Administration and consulted a Member Board Member personally known.

But, using theatrical terms, there were perhaps hundreds of "performers (including 'stars')" and a "cast of thousands"(registered attendees). Seriously and more politely many of the speakers were distinguished speakers known globally.

I cannot attempt the awesome task of counting, in the 390 pages book issued to those registered, the number of religions represented. This statistic may be available later from Chicago. My copy of the book is available for readers' perusal later.

There were 63 religions listed but this was incomplete because there were a number, including Unitarians, who were there in addition.

Unitarians had a 1 and 1/2 hour speaking session on 4 December. I was not in time for this. The topic was "Unitarian Universalists - working for peace, civil rights and the earth". Speakers were two American UU's (one a woman), Peter Abrehart (from the Melbourne Church, whom I was pleased

to meet at their exhibition later), and Pauline Rooney (Adelaide). \* (See end)

A rough estimate of the total number of presentations in thirty rooms and the huge Plenary Hall is perhaps 700. Average number of speakers could be at least three or four. Too many to count in total!

There were five sessions per day (mostly) - one and a half hours each- from 8 a.m. (morning observances-prayer, meditation, etc.) to 10.30 p.m. I attended ten, including the Closing Ceremony on the whole of the last afternoon, at which the Dalai Lama gave his blessing to perhaps a gathering of several thousand.

I thought I displayed plenty of fortitude in achieving ten sessions! Obviously, though, there was so much I couldn't witness which demonstrates that these comments can only be regarded as a view of the Parliament as I experienced it.

**My chief interest was in economic presentations during 7 December. These were:**

**"A new Manifesto for Global Economics", presented by Hans Kung, who got a great reception.**

**"Reflections on the Global Economic Crisis"**  
**and**  
**"Has Economics triumphed over Ethics?"**

**I rather think Economics had the better of Ethics in the debate but felt Economics wasn't much interested in discussing ethics and moral matters with perhaps little familiarity with either?**

Also attended were three meetings on Muslim affairs (there were many Muslims at the Parliament, it seemed). The most impressive for me was Imam Abdul Feisal Rauf, an American with a strong Middle Eastern family background (Gulf States, I think).

Imam Rauf is from New York where he has established the Cordoba Initiative. It is named after the period 800 to 1200 CE, when the Cordoba Caliphate ruled much of today's Spain and created the most enlightened, pluralistic and tolerant society on Earth. In New York today Jewish, Christian and Muslim organizations (see next page)

and secular institutions seek to follow Cordoba.

**Imam Rauf is the author of "What's right with Islam is right with America" as well as other books on a similar theme. "What's right with Islam..." is well worth reading.**

**Affinity Intercultural Foundation was represented by its President Mehmet Saral. We have had its C.E.O., Mehmet Ozalp, speak in Kirribilli.**

I did ask the President how much detail is discussed in the many meetings their news letter reports they have with other faiths, e.g.were the different pictures presented in the Koran and the New Testament of Jesus examined? His answer was difficult to follow and, I thought, inadequate. But perhaps I was nitpicking!

Other sessions attended were by Burmese monks who stuck to their education of children theme and could not be drawn to discuss politics, including Aung San Suu Kyi. They said Government did not interfere with their education practices. And at least they were at this Parliament. In Barcelona a similar group was stopped by Government from attending. Also, a contrast with the monks (next presentation) were the Quakers, in which, perhaps surprisingly, there was much interest.

Late in the programme, there was a 4.30 to 6.00 p.m. session on the "Holy Scriptures and questions of intended use". Plenty of variety here-Sikh, Muslims, Hindu, Buddhist and the Interfaith Church.

Throughout the week there was much music, dance, visual arts and story-telling for those who were able to handle them.

The whole operation on a day to day basis was faultlessly organized - as seen from my tiny spot on the total scene. The organisation prior to the Opening Ceremony must have required a truly enormous effort.

**An attempted personal conclusion: It remains to be seen what the Parliament can and will recommend in order that so much tremendous action in Melbourne makes an effective contribution to building a more just, peaceful and co-operative world.**

Past events have been in Chicago (1893), an inaugural gathering as part of the then Columbian Exposition, Parliaments in

Chicago (1993)-a centennial celebration, Capetown (1999), Barcelona (2004) and now Melbourne.

In 1993 and 1999 two Declarations were published: A Global Ethic (1993) and A Call to our Guiding Institutions (1999). As far as I'm aware this did not happen for Barcelona.

(\* List may need adjustment next Esprit).

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**Note from January Esprit
Daniel Lau and the other climate hunger strikers abandoned their strike as the Copenhagen meeting came to an end.**

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### Uh-oh

His wife's grave side service was just barely finished, when there was a massive clap of thunder, followed by a tremendous bolt of lightning, accompanied by even more thunder rumbling in the distance. The old man looked at the pastor and calmly said, 'Well, she's there.'

**Contributed by Candace Parks**

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The Harleys

Les Murray

Blats booted to blatant
dubbing the avenue dire
with rubbings of Sveinn Forkbeard
leading a black squall of Harleys
with Moe Snow-Whitebeard and

Possum Brushbeard and their ladies
and, sphincter-lipped, gunning,
massed in leather muscle on a run,
on a roll, Santas from Hell
like a whole shoal leaning

wide wristed, their tautness stable
in fluency, fast streetscape dwindling,
all riding astride, on the outside
of sleek grunt vehicles, woman-clung,
forty years on from Marlon.

“Conscious and Verbal” 1999

Leslie Allan Murray was born 1938 in Nabic, a village on the north coast of New South Wales.

Kiva Loans

Jan Tendys

At right is a picture of Mary-rose Ochiagha of Lagos State, Nigeria, who has almost paid back the loan given to her through the Kiva microcredit organisation.

Her \$US700 loan request was to enable her to purchase more clothes to sell. Spirit of Life participated in this loan in a small way as an experiment to see how well the Kiva system works.

When the loan is fully repaid, we can take our money back or reinvest it in another loan or reinvest it and add to the amount - perhaps spread it over several loans.

In both developing countries and developed countries, Kiva has to have an arrangement with Field Partners (microfinance organisations at the local level whom they consider are trustworthy and efficient). Kiva allows us to choose the recipient of the loan from a wide selection of men and women who wish to start up a business or improve a business or improve their housing or whatever. It is always a loan that is involved, never just a gift - that way the capital can keep circulating.

Mary-rose is 40 years old and married with 2 children. She tells us she has been in this business (selling clothes) for a long time. She says thanks to all Kiva lenders.

<http://www.kiva.org/>

Note: Spirit of Life and other Kiva participants in Mary-rose's loan did not receive interest. However, Kiva's Field Partner for the loan would have been free to charge interest.

Here's what Kiva says:

Self-sustainability is critical to creating long-term solutions to poverty, and charging interest to entrepreneurs is necessary for microfinance institutions to achieve this. Our Field Partners are free to charge interest, but Kiva will not partner with an organization that charges exorbitant interest rates. We also require Field Partners to fully disclose their interest rates. You can find more information about the interest rates that Kiva's field partners charge on our Field Partner pages: <http://www.kiva.org/about/partners> .

Microfinance is an expensive business, which is essentially the reason small loans are not provided by large banks. Charging interest to entrepreneurs enables our Field Partners to bear these costs and achieve self-sustainability.

To read more on this topic, I suggest you check out the following article, written by a Kiva Fellow who works with CEPRODEL, one of our field partners in Nicaragua:

<http://fellowblog.kiva.org/2010/01/07/bad-roads-interest-rates-and-mfi-sustainability/>

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Your SOL Committee has yet to make a decision on how satisfactory the Kiva method is.

See also: <http://www.kivafriends.org/index.php/topic,918.0.html>



# Flinders & Outback November 2009

**Helen Whatmough**

Our trip to the Centre was a big achievement for 2009; Col was feeling better after the long chemo treatments and surgery and keen to 'get moving again'.

The bus group was small (22) and the guide and driver experienced and very knowledgeable; we were the only Aussies and could answer questions about Australian language, names, history and even some places!

It was quite disturbing to see the effects of drought while travelling over the Hay Plain; wheat had been planted in the autumn, after some rain, but was so stunted and dry with no follow up rain, that the plan was to either to plough it in or try to retrieve some for feed. The vast area involved, over many hills was both surprising and depressing.

We think that it may have been burned in the fires in the area before Christmas.

Adelaide and the Flinders Ranges were quite cool weather wise but had long days of 40C + shortly after.

Port Augusta was interesting and the Wadlata Outback Centre there was a great surprise. The ancient geologic history of Central Australia, including the vast inland sea with its variety of life forms, as well as Aboriginal and European exploration and settlement histories were extremely well done. Modern technology combined with traditional artefacts kept us viewing for most of the afternoon.

Flinders Ranges, Wilpena Pound then Coober Pedy took us into the Outback red soil country.

A stop at Woomera, viewing the museum showing artefacts of missiles and rockets tested there, as well as reminding us of current activities in the area at Pine Gap. The story of Maralinga and the atomic bomb testing was hardly discussed until we visited the Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre at Uluru; the local aboriginals there had first hand knowledge of the effects on their people.

Coober Pedy was surreal - both the above ground lunar-type landscape dotted with mounds of spoil from the diggings and the underground living places; our hotel, with

a mix of above and below ground spaces, could have been a big city hotel!

The harsh climate was very daunting and made us wonder why people would choose to live there.

Once we crossed the border into the Northern Territory we were in Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park; we saw the sunset and evening sky bring out the many colours of Uluru, while having nibblies and a glass of wine!

The following day we watched sunrise at Uluru, from the new viewing centre and started to feel the extreme heat; we only did short trips, including a bus trip around Uluru, in the coolness of the morning and evening, not even venturing into the pool at our hotel in the heat!

We did have a visit from a dingo, out of the desert, at our front door, to our surprise and our Dutch neighbours delight - he fortunately didn't stay for long.

The Olgas, Kata Tjuta, and Mt Conner, are each larger than Uluru - Mt Conner, seen first from the road entering the area, is often mistaken for Uluru. The Kings Canyon was an overnight stop; the tour group was discouraged from climbing the canyon rim in the heat - the valley walk was quite sufficient!

We stopped at some stations for breaks on the way to Alice Springs; one was greater than one million acres in size. There were camel farms - the camels being sold to Middle East countries - cattle and tourist facilities. Some had retained their original bark roof shelters, built before the later houses - a hard life.

It was pleasant stopping at Stanley Chasm and Simpson's Gap before reaching Alice Springs; the story of the underground rivers explained why the Todd and Finke Rivers in the area were mainly dry and dusty ie the water runs beneath the river beds.

The town was not as busy as in the cooler time of the year as most visitors had headed south by November; only the O/S visitors ( and crazy Australians) come at this time of the year!

So, we weren't too sorry to head for the airport while most of the group pressed onto Darwin. We could see lots of red dust blowing from above in the plane and were glad to be heading towards the green hills surrounding Sydney.

# ON CARBON AND CONSCIENCE

**Margaret Armstrong**

They say that Travel Broadens The Mind. It also broadens the carbon footprint – especially if you fly. It was a few decades ago that I realized that our generation was using more than its fair share of petroleum resources – and when I chose to go by air, I was using more than my fair share within this generation. That was before global warming was seen as a real threat, and Peak Oil was not yet a possibility in the near term.

Several years ago, I did a mathematical calculation, reducing the estimated age of the Earth to one year. On that scale a biblical lifetime of three score years and ten (70) is less than half a second! A mere eyeblink! I then became even more shocked at what we are doing within our allotted eyeblink, and at a generation that seems to regard ALL resources as being there for us – NOW.

Last month, I came across data that indicated that the first oil strike in the USA was 150 years ago. That, dear reader, is the equivalent of just over one second in a year. In that one second, we are already within sight of the potential end of that resource. Does that fill you with pride?

So when I indulge myself with one more flight, I am in effect helping to deplete what rightly belongs to my grandchildren and beyond, AND adding to the problem of global warming. So the least I can do is to buy a Carbon Offset – sometimes called a Conscience Offset! I wanted to be sure of contributing to a reliable firm, so I consulted the Australian Conservation Foundation, and was referred to CLIMATE FRIENDLY.

I tell them what flights I have taken, then they calculate my share of CO2 production for the distance covered, and the cost to offset that. The money they receive is then invested in technologies which create enough clean energy to offset that CO2 output.

The offsets of my last two trips have been invested in an Indian wind farm and a microhydro project in China. So conscience is somewhat mollified.

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RE-INVENTING THE SACRED

Gretta Vosper

“WHY THE WAY WE LIVE
IS MORE IMPORTANT
THAN WHAT WE BELIEVE”

&

Val Webb

“THE BABY,
THE BATH WATER
AND THE BATH”

This is the title of a gathering with these two internationally acclaimed progressive authors, to be held in the

**Beecroft Community Centre,
9 am to 4 pm, Saturday April 24, 2010**

COMMON DREAMS ON THE ROAD CPRT (Freedom to Explore)* presents this April 24th workshop which is an echo event in Sydney of the International Common Dreams Conference of Religious Progressives to be held in St Kilda Town Hall, Melbourne, Victoria, April 15-18, 2010.

For more details please go to the

Common Dreams website:
www.commondreams.org.au

VAL WEBB is the well-known author of:
“Like Catching Water in a Net”

GRETTA VOSPER is Chair and Founder of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, and Minister at West Hill United Church, Ontario.

Noted as one of the most compelling women in Canada in 2009 by More Magazine, growing in both popularity and notoriety since the impressive launch of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity in November of 2004. The Centre’s contact list has grown from a few isolated individuals in Ontario to include members in six denominations and every province across the country. Notoriety in Rev. Vosper’s own denomination grew following an article, “Believing Outside the Box,” published in The United Church Observer (Feb, 2005) in which her unorthodox beliefs about a non-interventionist God

and the authority of the Bible were exposed.

The article provoked a stream of letters to the Editor that continued for a full year alternately vilifying her or lauding her honesty. Several demands were made for her dismissal from her position as a minister in the United Church of Canada including an attempt by a colleague to convene a panel to question her about her beliefs, a process Jack Spong immediately labelled a heresy trial.

He introduced Vosper to the readers of his weekly online column calling her “a brilliant, insightful and courageous young woman...one of the most exciting voices in 21st century Christianity” and “the leading voice for a scholarly and progressive Christianity” in Canada. Gretta Vosper’s 2008 book, “With or Without God” was met with both acclaim and vitriol from those inside and outside the church. It hit a national bestseller list within a week of its publication, and went into reprint before its publication date.

Principal Speaker at the forthcoming International Melbourne Conference, “Common Dreams”, Gretta Vosper, will come direct to Sydney to address the sub-title of her recent book: “With or Without God—Why the way we live is more important than what we believe”.

Fees:

Early Bird: \$50.00 (if received on or before February 24) Pensioner, Student or CPRT Member: \$55 All other Adults (after February 24): \$60

Provisions: Morning and Afternoon Tea, Substantial Lunch

Enquiries: The Registrar: Eric Stevenson , Phone: 02 9888 5361

Mobile: 0405 758 116

cprtfreedomtoexplore@yahoo.com.au

* CPRT is the Centre for Progressive Religious Thought

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.

Notice

DEADLINE for copy for the next issue of Esprit is
LAST SUNDAY OF MONTH

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