



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

Date	Speaker	Topic
10 May	Rev. Steve Wilson	Mother's Day Bargains and Boundary Disputes. This sermon pushes past the Hallmark sweetness of the holiday to look at all that mothering really requires. In this service the natural tensions between being a parent and person are acknowledged. In this service the goalposts for what it is to be a good parent are set high but realistic. Today we are going to work towards the end that perfect parenting does not become an enemy of good parenting.
17 May	Rev. Steve Wilson	Free Seminar the Group Home: "Free seminar at the Group Home" is a reflection on my twenty years of working in the homes of people who live with a mental illness and/or a developmental disability. In it I profile some old friends and share the lessons learned.
24 May	Rev. Steve Wilson	Shams and Rumi- Friends in Love: Rumi Persia's most famous poet did not become the Rumi we know until he took a chance on an unlikely friend. Come greet the esteemed Rumi and the homeless and questionable Shams. Their friendship is a soap-opera of intrigue that costs both a lot, and oddly enough saves them both.
31 May	Rev. Steve Wilson	Transcendentalism 101: An Idiot's Guide to Emerson The Transcendentalism of Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Henry Hedge, Thoreau, and Parker is the philosophical movement most associated with New England and Unitarian thought
7 June	Rev. Steve Wilson	The Goddess VS the Alphabet Come join to revisit the time when the Alphabet was being constructed, and in so perhaps the Goddess being undermined? The switch from a female to a male divine underway. Come watch this mediocre minister stretch his feeble mind back in time to imagine how it was when words were a new religious tool.

Opinions expressed in "Esprit" are not necessarily those of the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship.

14 June	Rev. Steve Wilson	REducating Isaac: A female friend turned to me and said, Men You can't live with them, and yet the hunting season is so short! This sermon looks at masculinity with clear eyes. On Sunday we will honor the virility men bring to the table of humanity and we will challenge the socialization that leaves so many men disconnected and violent.
21 June	Rev. Steve Wilson	What Would Buddha Do? On Letterman WWJD What Would Jesus Do? It is a great question. It is in reality oddly a very Unitarian Christian one to come from fundamentalist circles. Today we switch up this great question to ask what would happen if we switched gurus and refine the question to What Would Buddha Say if he was invited on to a late night talk show?. (This will, in all likelihood be my last sermon, (sad to even write it now)
28 June	Ross McLuckie	TBA

For Your Diary

The Centre for Progressive Religious Thought (Sydney) have secured Val Webb, the author of "Like Catching Water in a Net", as a lead speaker for our next Regional Gathering on **Saturday, August 29** from 9.30 am till 4.30 pm. The participants will gather in the courtyard of the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre at 9.30 am and the meetings will continue in The Gallery from 10 am till 4.30 pm. on that day.

From "Journey Online" (Carol Bennett)

Val Webb is a writer, teacher, artist, theologian and scientist who weaves knowledge and experience together as she encourages the reader to open themselves to a myriad of metaphors, symbols and images that reveal the Divine across cultures, religions and centuries. But this is far more than an historical journey. *Like catching water in a net* invites each one of us to re-image the Divine in ways which are relevant for our contemporary multi-faith contexts, as links and connections, similarities and commonalities in the ways in which God is imaged across religions are explored.

Blue Mountains Weekend

Theme: "Whereto from Here for the Tolerant and Open-Minded Person?" Plus some discussion about Building our own Theology . Leadership: Rev. Steve Wilson

Venue: The Holiday Ranch in the Blue Mountains (contact Eric Stevenson for actual location).Time: **Friday Evening June 5 till Sunday afternoon June 7**

Cost: Accommodation Free, Meals by Arrangement

Spirit of Life President's Report

Candace Parks

26 April 2009

Who would have thought over 4 years ago when a group of 12 enthusiastic Unitarians rolled up their sleeves and dug into pockets to start this fellowship that we would have even survived, much less flourished to become the close-knit spiritual family we are today?

As excited as we are with our increasing membership, the biggest challenge to our future is continued growth. To actively promote our Unitarian principles through our actions in the larger community, we need more people and more funds to carrying out the work. Therefore, our short term goal remains relatively unchanged – to grow in numbers. With the inevitable turnover of members, growth is critical just to maintain the status quo and even a bigger challenge to increase the size of the fellowship. A larger fellowship will bring us closer to our long term goal of being in a position to be a recognized alternative to dogmatic religious organisations, especially for students and other young people.

By far the most exciting development this year has been the opportunity to have the Rev Steve Wilson as our guest speaker on the Sundays while he has been in Sydney on holiday working on his book “Jack of No Trade, Master of Divinity”. (Watch for it. It's sure to be on the New York Times bestseller list and you will be able to tell your friends you knew him when.) Steve's presence and participation has brought a vitality and sense of humour to the fellowship which we will sorely miss when he returns to the States in July.

Other information regarding the past year which may be of interest is:

Statistics

Attendances: Average 15-16 per service, highest attendance 24.

Five new members

Mark McGregor

Colin Whatmough

Helen Whatmough

John Tendys

Dani Carlisle-Jones

Membership total 26, from original 12.

Guest speakers

The Rev Dorothy McRae-McMahon, former Pitt St Uniting Church minister

Mehmet Ozalp, from the Affinity Intercultural Foundation

Ted Nettle, from the Sea of Faith

Sarah Penika, Director of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Chior

Rev Steve Wilson, visiting US Unitarian minister

Promotion

New website (Check it out – sydneyunitarians.org)

Geoff – community notice boards

The Village Observer

North Shore Time Christmas and Easter editions

Letter box drops in suburbs between Lane Cove and Kirribilli

Kirribilli markets

Accomplishments

Emergency Fund contributions
- \$860 to Bushfire appeal
Growing association with CPRT

Social Events

Yulefest
Welcome party for Steve Wilson
Eric's 80th birthday party
Martin's 25th birthday party

Miscellaneous

Welcome the birth of Jarrah to Jason and Patricia
New hymnals
Paddy Ge has joined us every second Sunday on the piano
Catherine Branch (a Unitarian temporarily attending the Conservatorium has enhanced our service with her classical flute and we look forward to having her join us as her time allows during her stay in Sydney)
Reduced membership fees – Fees have been reduced to encourage membership. Please do not misinterpret this to mean that the fellowship does not still have the generous support of those of us who can afford it. We have great plans for additional promotion – all of which will require funding from us members. Having Steve here has given the fellowship a real boost and we do not want to lose that momentum. Your continued generosity and support is much appreciated.

Plans for next year

Continued growth
Participation in ANZUUA being held in Sydney the first weekend in October

Religious Renovators

Rev. Steve Wilson

Within the Western religious tradition there is a strong prophetic tradition that calls both religion and the broader society to evaluate its rituals, rites and ceremonies in light of a more basic moral accountability. In this beautiful self critical instinct, all the formality and scholarship, and priestly rites and etc, are looked at in light of how the poor, weak and downtrodden are treated.

But, when it comes to not morality, and justice, but to accuracy, Carl Sagan has smartly noted "No such critical instinct exists within religion.... it is sciences job to be that prophet to the truth."

I never noticed this before. It's when you stop and think about it a remarkable systematic oversight not to have more internal control mechanisms to keep Judaism, Christianity, and Islam honest with truth.

“It both makes me sad, and I hear it as a call that we as UU’s have such a big niche to fill.” We - as I spoke to in the sermon on Cosmology - have the collective job to do. We are scouts for new wisdom and we are bridges to how to make those truths religious.

I hope you can embrace that task. If sitting in the pews of the church on the front line of where the world’s truths become religiously digested feels daunting you are in good company.

Darwin worried about all that his collected insects and animals from the trip morally would bring. So have many others.

The truth is, enjoy the process or not, we here as Unitarians have the job of tearing at the walls others have lovingly built.

See,...without people and institutions like us, bringing forward the message of our inherent dignity not as sinners but as people with potential, making sacred the right for same sex people to marry, for women to be ministers, or for people of conscience who do not believe in God to lead congregations, we all would be trapped in the theological equivalent of a house with mouldy green shag rugs and bad wallpaper.

Without those like our ancestors forging ahead, all of what we tear at that others think is homey and comfortable, would over time just not useful anymore.

In a way we preserve the sacred for others. Even others that despise us.

Can you imagine what the religious world would look like if the church in the end had squashed Galileo’s or Copernicus’s teachings.

So not knowing exactly how to build what comes next, but with a little faith that newer is better, here we Unitarians are again out on the edge smashing through convention, even our own conventions with cautious optimism.

It is our task, it is your task too to build a theology for the way the things in the universe really work.

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Of Teabags and Styrofoam.

I acknowledge they can be useful, but I disapprove of tea bags. The content is usually enough for two (or even three) cups, but it is normally discarded after enfusing just one cup. I have an image of hundreds of millions of tea bags being discarded each day. More profit for the companies, more garbage for the planet! Personally, if I choose to have tea after our service, I claim someone else’s teabag before it is dumped.

All too often tea and coffee are drunk from Styrofoam containers – useful little things, but generally instant garbage after one “cuppa”. Some years ago, when I went to a lot more all-day gatherings, one organization encouraged us to make a distinguishing mark on our own “cup”, to pick up and use for the rest of the day. That cut the number of discards to about a third.

I have carried that habit over: on travel days with picnic stops, I will retain the same one till the end of the day. After our services, I will generally give mine a cursory rinse (mustn’t over-use the water!!) and bring it home to join my washing up. Of course, I have to remember to take it with me next time. But would it be that difficult for a few others to join me in this small gesture to relieve the earth of a little bit of junk? To be sure it is a bit of a nuisance – but not a BIG nuisance.

Margaret Armstrong

A Paper, Plastic or Crockery Cup?

From the EIA for Kids Website:

Should you choose paper cups over plastic cups since the paper cups are made from natural wood products and will degrade? Maybe not.

A study by Canadian scientist Martin Hocking shows that making a paper cup uses as much petroleum or natural gas as a polystyrene cup. Plus, the paper cup uses wood pulp. The Canadian study said, "The paper cup consumes 12 times as much steam, 36 times as much electricity, and twice as much cooling water as the plastic cup." And because the paper cup uses more raw materials and energy, it also costs 2.5 times more than the plastic cup. But the paper cup will degrade, right? Probably not. Modern landfills are designed to inhibit degradation so that toxic wastes do not seep into the surrounding soil and groundwater. The paper cup will still be a paper cup 20 years from now.

Comment by Jan Tendys: There is a lot of discussion on the internet regarding the humble cup. What surprised me was not that disposable cups are not considered environmentally friendly, but that crockery cups have a heavy environmental footprint too, particularly as they are fired at very high temperatures and require washing (in restaurants etc) in dishwashers.

New materials may change the picture, e.g. in 2009, a company designed a potential environmentally friendly replacement for polystyrene packaging created from fungi and agricultural waste, which it calls Acorn

At Spirit of Life you can choose a crockery cup, but you may wish to join in the washing up from time to time!

How is it with your Soul?

From "They Need to Give" by Victoria Weinstein US Unitarian Universalist).

In this vision of Stewardship, churches are not afraid to have expectations of their members, among them:

- That they will practice love and hospitality as their chief spiritual disciplines;
- That they will help when asked;
- That they will pledge generously to the church (and that they will fulfill those pledges;
- That they will pray for (or think good thoughts about) those who ask for their prayers;
- That they will make of themselves students of the religious and theological heritage of Unitarianism and Universalism;
- That they will make a joyful noise on Sunday mornings even if they can't carry a tune in a bucket;
- That they will consider no question too stupid to ask in learning how to participate in the democratic process or in leadership;
- That they will consider no congregational meeting too minor to attend; and that they will abide with all their hearts, all their minds, all their soul and all their strength by the covenant of the Church **Contributed by Geoff Mathews**

Snippets: The only animal who fronted up for a blessing on Steve's animal blessing day was Laurence and Michael's dog, Lulu. They say she has been a different person.

Steve will rejoin us after his quick trip home to conduct a wedding and to have further interviews in connection with an upcoming job.

Congratulations to Sherman and Jane on moving into a house of their own.

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"We as a species"

Rev. Steve Wilson

We as a species have not been able to combine
the changes that come with a serious search for who we are,
and the security of meanings that we have constructed along the way

We as a species have not been able at all to combine
the changes that come with a serious search for who we are,
and the security of meanings that we have constructed along the way.

Make no bones about it, that is why there is a war between science and religion.
The war is not rooted in rationality, it is rooted in the way curiosity, fear, tradition, faith
meet.

Maybe it is inevitable.

Maybe the telescopes, microscopes, and Darwin's journals really offer nothing that
satisfies the deepest longing of our souls, Maybe?

But just maybe the rumours of glory we have always told ourselves about that something
special about us in particular and life itself are sourced from a real spring.

Just maybe.

Theology II:

Rev. Steve Wilson

Us and Other

It is a cross cultural phenomenon that most people think they are the norm.

It sounds silly to say it, but it just might be human nature for each person to think that they
are more in touch with reality than their neighbour.

With that truth, it is a short walk that most people make to believe, that they and their
group are not only normal, but really the definition of normal.

In a subtle way everyone tends to feel closer to what is true and right than the others.

Oddly enough this might even be a touch of what it is to be healthy.

In the language of one tribe in Africa their tribe is actually the same word for human, and
the word for all outside the tribe is translatable as other. Bold! But not surprising.

Do you think that the way you view the world is pretty accurate? Ask yourself.

I pray your answer is, "Yes."

Let's call this our first truth that everyone walks around thinking they're right as our first
sociological truth.

Given the truth that “we all” define the world, it is not surprising, even something of a primitive instinct, ...maybe a hidden survival instinct that extends down throughout history to want to see one’s world-view lived out...

This might be an expression of mental health, but it is of course one of the world’s deep and dangerous truths.

(Ok, our first truth can have dangerous implications.)

There is another old and truth filled statement that the person (or institution) that stands for nothing will fall for anything.

For any person or group who walks in the room with that pluralism this is wary advice.

If it is true that it is human nature that most of us think we get reality, right;
And this is a potentially dangerous thing;
And that there is a fear that if you stand for nothing you will fall for anything

We have an important but thin line to walk, don’t we?

The degree to which we feel and look like we are sensitive, curious, and broad-minded, or that we are distracted, running around digging shallow holes is a careful act.

Where are we at the Spirit of Life creating a rich rainbow, and where are we negotiating a truce in a spiritual tug of war?

Are we in our own little neck of the theological wood in the Kirribilli Neighborhood Center doing religion innovatively or making Hobo stew with all that we bring in?

I think the real question is: are what we doing something of depth or something transient. The answer is of course not a single one. For it is different for each person.

We are engaged in an experiment that needs to be careful and meaningful all at the same time.

The world is watching.

Let’s demand of ourselves that we do this well.

Our growth as a fellowship, ...

our ability to provide a safe, challenging spiritual home for people,

our success will largely depend on how we do this.

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.

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.