



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

AGM on 21 March

7 March, Candace Parks: **“The Power of Connection.”**

Power—the ability to get things done—lies in numbers and organization. Throughout history, power based on domination and control has made its mark. But there is another kind of power, too, call it people power. It comes about mainly through a change of consciousness, an altered perception of what's possible.

14 March **Mary Lou Johnson:** **“Faith and Reason.”**
Guest speaker

500 years ago we emerged from the Dark Ages into the Enlightenment—the age of reason and of science. It has taken us to the brink of destroying our planet. Where do we go from here and how do we achieve balance?

Mary Lou Johnson is visiting from Canada where she is the chair of the Worship Committee at the Unitarian Fellowship of Kelowna in BC. She was the founder of the Canadian Holistic Nurses Assn. and has spent much of her life on the front lines of psychosocial change.

21 March Colin Whatmough: **“Marcus Borg and Liberal Christianity.”**

28 March Martin Horlacher: **“A Way of Life.”**

4 April, Ginna Hastings: **“Jesus was a liberal.”**

11 April, **Bill Lowton:** **“A life in Welfare.”**
Guest speaker

18 April Ross McLuckie **“Solitude”**

25 April Janet Horton **“The Tao of iPod.”**

Haiti Story

Geoff Matthews writes:

I had a great trip to the States for a holiday just after Christmas for three weeks. I visited Greenville, South Carolina where I used to live, catching up with friends, and my very good friends in Fort Lauderdale in Florida. Gary is in the Foreign Service in Human Resources, and after two year stints in Manila and Macedonia they are back in the States. His area of support besides Florida is Trinidad / Tobago, Dominican Republic and Haiti. He has been working in Haiti since the disaster and I thought I would share with you a note he sent me recently of the acute devastation there. It has been, as you could imagine, a traumatic experience for him. He came home for Valentine's Day, not sure if he has gone back, probably has.

Geoff's friend, Gary, writes.

I'm still in Haiti, and I've been here for a week. It is a true human tragedy. I heard someone say, "If I told you about it as best I could, it wouldn't be enough." Even that doesn't express it. Just with the local employees' stories, it is inconceivable. After hearing an employee talking about her experience, I said, "I hear your voice, and I understand the words you are saying, but there is just no place in my head for it to go." One of my staff has said a couple of times, "I look back and I realize now, that day was a beautiful day - it was just a beautiful day, it was just too beautiful."

I was walking through a section at the embassy in the middle of the day, and I saw a young woman, local employee, laying on a cot in a cubicle covered by a blanket and across her eyes, wearing one of those things that block out the light; like many wear on airplanes or to bed to sleep during the day. I asked about it, and her colleague said that her mother had just died from injuries, 11 days after the quake; and I'm sure she didn't die while getting medical care of any kind. It turns out her mother was the last of her entire immediate and extended family to die, leaving her alone in the world. We are quite worried for her. We are also very worried for another local employee who lost two of his three children. He was late picking them up from school, and they died when the school collapsed. He blames himself for their

deaths. That's just two stories, many local employees have lost everything and everyone, and then multiply that by 10's of thousands to consider the rest of the population. We have a team of social workers and a psychiatrist here that are trying to help, I think they are helping many, but some are really in despair. You see people sitting around, staring down at their hands, then they come back to earth, get up and walk off; back to work. All you can really do, is ask how they are and listen. I hope these people can come around.

People are desperate to bury the dead before disease sweeps through, and there are still many bodies that haven't been dealt with. Besides the mass graves you hear about on the news, many families are burying their family members themselves anywhere they can dig. Some bodies are being laid on tires, doused with gasoline, and lit on fire...in the street in many cases.

An American employee was living in a house that was built on the side of a steep ravine. Part was on solid ground and the part over the edge of the ravine was reinforced by beams and stilt like structures to hold up that side of the house. She had just walked her housekeeper out to her gate to let her out when the quake hit. When it was over all that was left of the house and property where she lived was the spot on which she was standing and the gate that opened onto the street. There was nothing behind her but air and a steep, deep drop off. Apparently she then pulled more than a dozen of her neighbours out of the rubble of their houses, including the Spanish Ambassador and his wife. When she got to the embassy, she kept helping others to the point of exhaustion. After being forced to lay down for sleep, it was noticed that she was up immediately and back to helping others. They evacuated her because she couldn't stop.

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Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship has paid \$250 from our **Emergency Fund** to the Unitarian Universalist Association's fund for helping Haiti. The last time SOL gave money through the UUA (for Katrina) the latter were meticulous in letting us know how the fund money was spent.

**Jan Tendys**

## Correction

Apologies for omission of Jim Scarfe's conclusions (given below) from his "2009 Parliament of the World's Religions" in last month's Esprit  
**Jan Tendys**

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.

It is surely important that 1993 and 1999 be followed with an effective statement which crystallized the conclusions from the Melbourne Parliament.

I suggest this should be designed so that as much as possible of the world that is listening is reached, particularly the great number of religious sceptics and those who have no opinion who are everywhere.

If they are listening!

**Jim Scarfe**

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### H.G.Wells' View of Jesus.

**Jim Scarfe** prefaced his talk to Spirit of Life on 31 January by remarking that Unitarians, who have roots in Christianity, have never been comfortable with the orthodox Christian accounts of Jesus' birth, life and death.

Many Unitarians believe that Jesus was special, but that specialness does not come from belief in the supernatural nature of his birth, the supposed miracles he performed or the manner of his death. For many Unitarians the specialness of Jesus comes through the way he lived his life as a human being. It is this image of Jesus that many Unitarians have followed over the years. And it is this image of Jesus that can be compared with that presented by H.G. Wells in an early chapter of his "Short History of the World" entitled "The Teaching of Jesus". It is one chapter out of 67 in 384 pages. The "Short History" was first published in 1922 and re-edited and issued in 2006.

Wells makes it clear from the outset that he speaks as an historian. It is important to keep history and theology apart, he says.

But he has no doubts about the historical Jesus. A very definite personality. "Here was a man. This could not have been invented."

Jesus, Wells says, was clearly very human, very earnest and passionate, capable of swift anger and teaching a new and simple and profound doctrine -the universal loving Fatherhood of God and the coming Kingdom of Heaven.

Wells, not surprisingly, does not debate such as the Virgin Birth, Jesus' death, the Ascension and Atonement. He simply ignores them. The important story from the Gospels is the Teaching.

His view of the Kingdom also avoids its eschatological aspects-the picture of the Kingdom coming only at the end of time.

For Wells it is here and now.

One should bear in mind that Wells was a Socialist and a Pacifist and these views and those on a World State (political unification) may be discerned in his version of Jesus' Teaching.

The doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven, Wells claims, is certainly one of the most revolutionary doctrines that ever stirred and changed human thought. As Jesus seems to have preached it, it was no less than a bold and uncompromising demand for a complete change and cleansing of our struggling race.

It is clear, Wells says, that Jesus spoke out against all gradations of the economic system, all private wealth and personal advantage. For example the story of the young man who had great possessions. "Sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven".

Wells points out that Jesus attacked the Jews, his own people, regarding themselves as the Chosen Race. For example, the Good Samaritan. God, Jesus taught, is no bargainer, there are no favourites in the Kingdom.

We are reminded of the encounters with the Pharisees and Scribes. "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, because you shut the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for you enter not yourselves nor allow those who would enter, to go in".

Wells goes on: It was not only a moral and social revolution that Jesus proclaimed; it is clear that his teaching had a political bent of the plainest sort. It is true that he said his

the hearts of men and not upon a throne; but it is equally clear that wherever and in what measure his kingdom was set up in the hearts of men, the outer world would be revolutionised and made new.

He concludes: In the blaze of this kingdom of Jesus there was to be no property, no privilege, no pride and precedence; no motive indeed and no reward but love.

Is it any wonder that the priests realized that between this man and themselves there was no choice but that he or priestcraft should perish.

Is it any wonder that Roman soldiers, confronted and amazed by something soaring over their comprehension and threatening all their disciplines, should take refuge in wild laughter, and crown him with thorns and robe him in purple and make a mock Caesar of him.

For to take him seriously. Wells concludes, was to enter upon a strange and alarming life, to abandon habits, to control instincts and habits, to essay an incredible happiness..... The dots, Wells seems to be saying mean "Now, you decide".

Jim's comment: I can only say Amen. I am constantly aware of my own shortcomings-my impatience, anxiety, getting discouraged, allowing circumstances to effect me when they shouldn't, and so on! Forgetting "Self forgetfulness".

Jim spoke of his friendship, many years ago, with the late Rev. Hedley Bunton, Minister of the Brown Street Congregational Church in Newcastle. Mr and Mrs Bunton went to China in 1932 as LMS missionaries, endured privation under the Japanese and the Chinese Communists. Hedley said the Japanese were preferable!

He preached and counselled how belief in "Seek ye first..."\* helped effectively in the challenges of everyday life. Jim says he finds recollection of this counsel always works.

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* But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness... . Mt .6, 33

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Jim will tell us more about HG Wells next month. JT

## Seeking the Good

All Unitarians seek the Good, however variously we interpret that. As Gretta Vosper says: the way we live is more important than what we believe.

Don't forget the seminar at Beecroft on 24th April, 2010, named "Reinventing the Sacred" with Dr. Gretta Vosper and Dr. Val Webb .  
cprtfreedomtoexplore@yahoo.com.au

Gretta will also be one of the speakers at Common Dreams 2 in Melbourne, 15-18 April. Visit the website, [www.commondreams.org.au](http://www.commondreams.org.au) to check out the program and register if you wish.

## ~~~~~ THE 14 BILLION YEAR EVOLUTIONARY STORY OF THE COSMOS

(Adapted from an address by **Eric Stevenson** at the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship)

The seventh principle of our Fellowship is, "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part". Author, Bruce Sanguin,\* affirms that there are three necessary foundations for religious living. He says, we may choose to act "as though" or "as if" they were true and see where they lead us. To use his own words, the three affirmations are:

- An affirmation of "creation as sacred text".
- An affirmation that "we have the capacity to consciously evolve, (and in particular, to evolve toward ever-enlarged perspectives)" which is "a primary practice" of his kind of spirituality.
- An affirmation that "the 14 billion-year evolutionary story of the cosmos

“may serve as a sacred myth for our age.”

Our seventh Unitarian principle relates to the third affirmation which has to do with my origins - addressing the mystery of how I and my culture came to be, and how I fit, in that “interdependent web of all existence of which I am a part”.

Traditional religion has an equivalent category which is not an affirmation but a categorical stipulation. The human species was perfectly created in isolation from the rest of nature; and the male of the species was given divine authority to dominate the earth and subdue it. This “perfect” condition was marred by “sin”, but the assignment was never revoked.

In trying to fathom this mystery in the twenty-first century, I have an entirely different perspective than the writer of the old creation story. I therefore feel morally obliged to use scientific terminology and a more informed body of knowledge as well as the mythological language of the creation story to express the unknowable and indescribable quality of the world in which I have evolved.

Sanguin affirms the need in us for a Sacred Story upon which to base our belief system. Neither the sacred myths of a six day creation nor the revered story of the Rainbow Serpent will be acceptable to the rising generation of young Australians. They will need a story which sits well with the latest findings of Cosmology and Evolution. Sanguin’s Sacred Story does that. It is the fourteen billion year evolutionary story of the cosmos and it is linked with his first affirmation. Not only does creation provide the answer for an inspiring Sacred Text which is written in the stars; it also is more helpful than the story of Adam and Eve.

**Let us look at the ways the new story has got to differ from the traditional myths about our beginnings. There will be, however, one similarity between the old story and the new which we must not dismiss. They both will highlight the endemic need for human beings to ponder their beginnings and to provide a starting point for their spiritual journeys.**

Nevertheless, the concept of space in any new sacred story has to be different. Without question, the limited idea of a heaven up there and an earth down here is

definitely out. But what about the difficulty of using non-limiting nouns and adjectives and verbs about a vaster than vast cosmos which extends (wrong verb) for light years, and is still there beyond the furthest (wrong adjective) star????

The new story’s concept of time also has got to be different. We need help to put into words a story which starts before (wrong preposition) references to time make sense. When there is no such thing as time, how do you talk about it without using such a preposition as ‘before’ or a phrase like ‘in the beginning’, or even the culturally honoured way of opening a fairy story, ‘once upon a time’???

The ideas of ‘creator(s)’ and ‘the created’ and ‘designer(s)’ and ‘the designed’ have also got to go. In a technological age in which we cannot imagine a watch without a watchmaker, how can we stop ourselves from talking about Nature as if it was built like a watch?! **Thomas Berry suggests we try talking about an interiority in Nature\* which drives it to higher and better things.. Is this what we mean when we sing ‘Spirit of Life’?** He gives this interiority mystical status. But whether it is regarded as sacred or secular it works fairly well if our story is only about planet earth. But it is a pretty big interiority to apply to the cosmos!!! And what about an ‘exteriority’? (which I think is what panentheism and the process theologians are attempting to tackle)???

**We seem to be talking about the inner qualities of all that is, which drive nature into more and more intricate ways of evolving and into increasing refinement and sensitivity of human awareness.** So, as Thomas Berry\* says, dirt eventually ‘got up and started writing Shakespeare’!!! And it is still happening. So, unlike the Adam and Eve story, the new story is never ending. And that applies also to our increasing sensitivities to, and our expanding understandings of our environment

Finally, the vital elements of the new Sacred Story cannot be the entire possession of one religion. For the story to make sense, it has to be shared and continually modified in an up-to-date multi-cultural and interdisciplinary setting. Otherwise we finish up talking to ourselves and convincing ourselves that we know it all. The rapidity with

## King's Chapel Boston

- a unique Unitarian Church

Max Lawson

(This article is based on an interview with the Rev. Dr. Earl K. Holt, III, Senior Minister, King's Chapel, Boston on 19th June 2009)

which new scientific knowledge and philosophical thought is becoming available, demands it.

The language of a new Sacred Story will have to address issues which are beyond space and time and which will endeavour to come to terms with a life force within and/or surrounding the evolutionary process. It will be a serial story with repeated revised versions as our sensitivities and knowledge increase. And its language must never be set in concrete or idolised like the old story has been. So in composing a New Sacred Story it would seem impossible to do so without the use of both scientific terminology and mythological figures of speech. Scientific theory can be applied to the black holes in space, but we must never lose the capacity to provide in a meaningful religious language for the modern generation what the old story has done for millions of flat earth believers – a foundation on which to build a faith community.

This is not a doctrine however! It is a search for meaning based upon the words of a wise commentator who advises you to, “act as if the universe was thus constructed, and see what happens to your own energy, your own passion, your own hopefulness, and your own willingness to take action for a more healthy planet.”\*

\*Thomas Berry: Taken from an address by Bruce Sanguin on 25/05/09 who is the author of “Darwin, Divinity and the Dawn of the Cosmos”. Topic: “Ecology, Spirituality and the Evolution of Consciousness”. (Readings from this address were included in Esprit of September 2009.)

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*The great affair, the love affair with life,
is to live as variously as possible,
to groom one's curiosity like a high-spirited
thoroughbred,
climb aboard, and gallop over the thick, sun-
struck hills every day.*

From “The Great Affair” by Diane Ackerman

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**THANKS TO CANDACE FOR HOSTING**

**OUR BIRTHDAY PARTY**

**AND TO PETER AND OTHER BODS WHO DID THE  
MEAT COOKING AND EVERYONE WHO MADE IT  
SUCH A PLEASANT & CHATTY AFTERNOON.**

King's Chapel, Boston is a short walk from the UUA headquarters on Beacon Street. Dr. Holt ruefully recalled an out of town Unitarian visitor coming to a King's Chapel service and afterwards remarking to Dr. Holt in effect, "Do the people at the headquarters know what you are getting away with down here?"

King's Chapel, Boston has been "getting away with it" for over three hundred years. Moreover, the church is now up to its ninth edition of the 550 page red hardcover Book of Common Prayer according to Use in King's Chapel.

In an insightful account of a visit to King's Chapel, Suzanne Strempek Shea mused, "I could have plunked any member of my Roman Catholic family in this church this morning and afterwards heard nary a 'What was that all about?'"(1)

King's Chapel with its fascinating history is not only an anomaly in Unitarianism, but part of a dwindling Christian counter-culture presence in the denomination at large.

Before the American War of Independence, King's Chapel had been an Anglican chapel serving the small community that still adhered to the Church of England, much to the hostility of the local Puritans. When the War of Independence began, not only did the British troops leave Boston, but the Anglican rector and many of his parishioners decided to go with them. The remnant of the congregation that was left became "the freest church in Boston" - cut off from Anglicanism on the one hand and on the other not subject to the Standing Orders of the established Puritan/Calvinist church of Massachusetts Bay Colony.

King's Chapel, now adrift, had a chance "to create a truly Republican religion for the new republic." (2) What happened was a compromise: Unitarian theology and an Anglican liturgy higher than that of even many American Episcopal churches. (3) Although this model (or, as Harvey Cox has noted,

"what harsher critics might have called a pot-pourri" (4) of Unitarian theology and Anglican liturgy may have become a template to follow "these religious proportions did not catch on with the rest of the population of the new nation." (5)

When the Apostle's Creed was removed from the King's Chapel prayer book in 1810 the church became unequivocally Unitarian (although curiously the Creed still remained on the walls of the church). King's Chapel is the oldest Unitarian Church in the United States, a claim sometimes challenged in Philadelphia as it was first U.S. Church to include "Unitarian" in its actual title.

There is no denying that King's Chapel remains a flagship for the Christian presence in the Unitarian Universalist movement. Of the 25 churches within the UUA Christian Fellowship - admittedly 20 of the 25 churches come from the greater Boston area - old traditions indeed die hard. King's Chapel has also kept up links since the 1920's with the Unitarian churches in Transylvania (Romania) which are in the liberal Christian tradition.

Although there are connections with such European Unitarianism as well as British Unitarianism, American Unitarianism is largely "an indigenous affair." (6) This is partly because of its reaction to the Puritan/Calvinist doctrines particularly concerning "the innate depravity of mankind" and "double predestination." It is also partly because what was to become American Unitarianism came under the influence of the French Age of Enlightenment, the American Revolution of 1776 and The American Declaration of Independence itself, signed by a number of "Unitarians" or Unitarian fellow travellers.

Throughout its turbulent history, King's Chapel has maintained a distinctly Christian perspective, even if it is part of the minority of "holdouts within Unitarian Universalism". (7)  
Notes:

1. Suzanne Strempek Shea, "King's Chapel, Boston" in Sundays in America: a Yearlong Road Trip in Search of Christian Faith (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008) p. 225.

2. Harvey Cox, "the Future of Religion," Chapter 9 in Many Mansions: a Christian's Encounter with Other Faiths (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988P, P. 208

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid

5. Ibid: p. 209.

6. Paul K. Conkin, American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina press, 1977) p. 57.

7. Ibid: p. 107.

## Smile a While

A 1st grade school teacher had twenty-six students in her class. She presented each child in her classroom with the 1st half of a well-known proverb and asked them to come up with the remainder of the proverb. Here's some results:

- 1. Don't change horses**  
*until they stop running.*
- 2. Strike while the**  
*bug is close.*
- 3. It's always darkest before**  
*Daylight Saving Time.*
- 4. Never underestimate the power of**  
*termites.*
- 5. You can lead a horse to water but**  
*How?*
- 6. Don't bite the hand that**  
*looks dirty.*
- 7. No news is**  
*Impossible*
- 8. A miss is as good as a**  
*Mr.*
- 9. You can't teach an old dog new**  
*Maths*
- 10. If you lie down with dogs, you'll**  
*stink in the morning.*

***More of these from the insightful 6 year olds another time.***

**Contributed by Virginia Hastings**

## Jottings

- Steve Wilson spoke to Committee meeting last week, via Skype; he said he is very busy virtually holding down three jobs and that he has more money but less time to spend it! He is promising to visit us again next (US) winter.

-Lawrence is looking forward to his son permanently relocating to Sydney.

-Carolyn & Peter's daughter, Karen, was surprised at how mild the weather was in Vancouver on her return; we can see this on the Winter Olympics - just like snow in Australia with lots of rocks and grass!

**Any jottings to Helen Whatmough for the next Esprit.**

## Lot's Wife

The Sunday School teacher was describing how Lot's wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt, when little Jason interrupted, 'My Mummy looked back once while she was driving,' he announced triumphantly, 'and she turned into a telephone pole!'

**Contributed by Candace Parks**

*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 THE MONTH

Please note:

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Would you care to join us?**

**Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter**

If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring 9428-2244, consult our website [www.sydneyunitarians.com](http://www.sydneyunitarians.com) or speak to one of our members before or after the Sunday service. Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee.