



Schedule of Services

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

2 October, **No service owing to markets.**

9 October, **No service owing to Kirribilli celebrations.**

16th October, **GINNA HASTINGS: "Has our society lost its moral compass?"**
With all the press reports about corruption in many places in our society, it feels like we have lost our moral compass as a society. Have we really?

23 October, **COLIN WHATMOUGH: "Privatisation - the Extent and the Myth"**
Australia once prided itself as an egalitarian nation which it is not now. The significant difference between then and now is our current commitment to privatisation.

30 October, **Rev. Geoff Usher: "A Perpetual Parsonical Problem".**

One of the biggest problems in announcing sermon titles in advance is that people may think they know what you're going to say, so they think they need not come to hear it.

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**From the Sublime.....**

Real Ads

FREE PUPPIES - 1/2 Cocker Spaniel, 1/2 sneaky neighbour's dog.

FREE PUPPIES. - Mother, A Kennel Club registered German Shepherd. Father, Super Dog ... . Able to leap tall fences in a single bound.

FOUND DIRTY WHITE DOG. - Looks like a rat. Been out a while. Better be a big reward.

WEDDING DRESS FOR SALE . Worn once by mistake.... Call Veronica

FOR SALE BY OWNER. - Complete set of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 45 volumes. Excellent condition. \$200 or best offer. No longer needed, Got married last month. Wife knows everything.

WANTED - somebody to go back in time with. This is not a joke. You'll get paid after we get back. Must bring your own weapons. Safety not guaranteed. I have only done this once before.

***Contributed by someone who does not wish to be acknowledged .***

## The Story of our Symbol, part 2

*Rev. Geoff Usher*

*Geoff summarised part 1, then continued:*

For two centuries the Czechs enjoyed a measure of liberty, but in 1620 their country was conquered by the Austrians. Although by then Czechoslovakia was mostly Protestant, Roman Catholicism was made the state religion. There followed three centuries of heavy oppression, which continued until the break-up of the Austrian Empire during the Great War of 1914-1918

That leads into the story of Norbert Capek, who was born in 1870 and who disliked the Catholic faith of his family. He became a Baptist - a Bible salesman and a missionary preacher - and started a magazine in which he featured articles on psychology and science. **He was alert to all the political and intellectual issues of the day and, like Jan Hus five centuries earlier, he insisted that religion must apply to life.**

Capek was raided by the police more than once, and eventually - again like Hus - he decided that he should leave, to avoid placing his friends and supporters in danger.

Through his Baptist connections he was able to go abroad, and he ended up in the United States of America, where he and his wife Maja - having become dissatisfied with the Baptist faith - joined the Unitarian Church in East Orange, New Jersey.

Overjoyed to find the kind of faith toward which he had been moving for so long, Capek became a missionary again. When the Great War was over and the new Czech nation had been launched, he was sent by the American Unitarian Association as a Unitarian missionary to Prague.

The Czech people had never heard of this "new" religion, but they listened eagerly to the message as Capek had believed they would, and eventually the Capeks built their own place, called "Unitaria".

Because the congregation had people of many

backgrounds, most of them rebelling against religious orthodoxies and dogmatism, Capek kept things simple - but he felt the need for a symbolic ritual that would bind the people together, in which everyone could participate without reservation. So he conceived the Flower Communion, and that story deserves a whole service to itself.

A few years of growth and prosperity were followed by the difficulties of the Great Depression, and then came Hitler's takeover of Czechoslovakia. **As a public figure known for his support of liberalism, Capek was in trouble. Eventually - inevitably - he was arrested and all his papers were seized. In keeping with the bizarre lunacy of Nazism, this patriotic Czech was charged with treason.** For some reason he was released, but then the Czech Resistance assassinated the chief local Nazi. In retaliation, Capek was arrested and sent off to Dachau, his papers marked "Return unwanted". He was a doomed man, and one day in 1942, as part of their "experiments" the guards injected him with a lethal poison - pus!

Norbert Capek embodied the words of Jan Hus:

God needs people who will  
Seek the truth,  
Listen to the truth,  
Teach the truth,  
Abide by the truth,  
And defend the truth  
Even unto death.

The Nazis and the horrors they brought to Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, and the legacy of Norbert Capek and his Flower Communion, provide a link to Part 2 of the story of our symbol of the Flaming Chalice in the twentieth century.

In 1939 a small group of Unitarians in the USA decided that they had to give public witness to their convictions regarding human dignity and service to others. **They formed the Unitarian Service Committee, similar in dedication and principles to the American Friends Service Committee - the Quakers.** They were particularly concerned with helping refugees escaping the horrors of

with helping refugees escaping the horrors of Nazi Germany from various war-torn European countries.

An Austrian refugee, Hans Deutsch, lived in Paris until France was invaded in 1940. He then went to Portugal, where he joined the staff of the Unitarian Service Committee for six months as secretary and assistant to its Executive Director, Dr Charles R Joy.

It had become apparent that some kind of seal, emblem or badge was needed, to bridge the language gap and help to identify the USC workers to the refugees. Hans Deutsch was an artist and draftsman, as well as a musician, and Dr Joy asked him to design an appropriate emblem for the USC.

**And so, the Flaming Chalice came into being, as a symbol which is now recognised throughout many countries as the emblem of Unitarianism - or Unitarian Universalism - since the merger of those two traditions in 1961.**

The original design is not easily found in a form available for copying. It is shown in this account of the USC .  
<http://67.225.131.93/files/TheSharps.pdf>

The symbol is usually referred to as the "Flaming Chalice", but the adjective upsets some people because it sounds like a swear word, making it somewhat undignified and even comic. They don't want to have an expletive describing the chalice. It is a bit like the popular morning hymn "O Life that maketh all things new - the blooming earth, the thoughts of men". "The blooming earth" sounds like an expletive, and in a more modern hymn book it has been altered to "the flowers of earth"..

I am not aware of any record to indicate that Hans Deutsch was familiar with the story of Jan Hus and the use of a flaming chalice by his followers as a badge. Nor am I aware of any record to indicate that he was familiar with the story of Norbert Capek, as a contemporary Unitarian in Czechoslovakia. However, he used familiar elements which would be easily recognised, but which could

be interpreted according to the various religious or cultural backgrounds of the refugees, of the USC members themselves, and of other people working with the USC members.

**The chalice:** It is a sacred symbol for many religions. It reflects the virtue of sharing with everyone the contents of a common cup.

**The oil:** Oil is set aside amongst the elements of the earth as a healing and binding force. "Thou anointest my head with oil".

**The flame:** Fire - the flame - signifies transcendence, and the triumph of truth over superstition and fear, of light over darkness. It also offers a silent invitation to share in the warmth of fellowship.

**The shape:** The flame above the chalice suggests the form of a cross, as a reminder of our roots in the Christian tradition.

**The circle:** Sometimes a circle is used to enclose both the flame and the chalice, and becomes a poignant declaration that all the earth and its inhabitants are one.

The Universalist Church of America and the American Unitarian Association merged in 1961, and their respective Service Committees also merged. In 1963 Joe Stoeltje redesigned the emblem, moving the Flaming Chalice to the left (Was that a deliberate decision, to go the left rather than the right?) within two coinciding and overlapping circles. Then in 1973 a new design of the flaming chalice logo, by Boston art student Hrair Vartanian, was adopted by the UU Service Committee.

Other symbols and variants have been used by Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist groups. The circle, with an off-centre cross, was used in the 1940s by a group of Universalist ministers - mostly members of a group called the "Humiliati" - who wished to emphasise a more universal philosophy in contrast to the exclusively Christian-oriented character of Universalism. The cross was placed to one side of the circle to acknowledge the belief that no single symbol, form or expression was entitled to the place as the central or only vehicle for the universal spirit, because there was room within the circle for all of humankind's expressions of faith.

In 1948 a member of the "Humiliati" visited England, and discovered with some surprise that the Rev Arthur Peacock had used the same symbol in the Universalist Church in London, almost half a century before it had first been used in America.

The circle and off-centre cross was used extensively by many Universalist churches as the symbol of the "New Universalism", which wanted to get away from partialisms and parochialisms of all kinds. It can still be found in some Universalist churches, and it is used in various ways by people who continue to recognise and respect its unique spiritual and symbolic message. Some groups, particularly those with a Unitarian Universalist background rather than a Universalist history, have replaced the cross with a flaming chalice, but still usually placed off-centre. Sometimes two coinciding and overlapping circles are used, to represent the two traditions which merged in 1961.

Just as there are many variants and forms of the cross or crucifix used on Christian churches, in Christian art, and by individual Christians, so there are numerous variants of our Flaming Chalice.

In Britain what was often called the "chunky chalice" was adopted by one person who was in charge of General Assembly publications in the 1960s. It was the one with which I was first familiar, and I used it on the letterhead paper of the Sydney Unitarian Church and then the Australian and New Zealand Unitarian Association. The Canadian Unitarians put it within a maple leaf.

However, some people considered the "chunky chalice" to be undignified and uninspiring. One problem was that at the same time as the chunky chalice appeared, the British Gas Board adopted a little chap with a similar flame as its symbol and called it "Mr Therm". All right for a gas board, but perhaps less dignified for a religious organisation.

In the UK John and Dot Hewerdine developed a range of distinctive Blue John jewellery, with the Flaming Chalice motif. The slender Flaming Chalice of my tie is repeated, enclosed, in my pendant, which I

always wear.

One of the major exercises that I regularly set my communication students when I was teaching at Petersham College of TAFE was to get them to prepare an assignment on non-verbal communication - eg flags, road signs, the use of colour, standard international signs such as those used for public toilets - because symbols, like flags or road signs that use no words, form a significant element in every culture but also help to transcend the barriers created by language.

Organisations and communities are often held together more closely by common symbols which represent shared meanings. Various religious and secular emblems throughout the centuries have evoked memories that bind people together in a common view of life and a shared destiny. Symbols are as much a part of the life of a group as food, shelter and clothing are for the individual.

There is, of course, no such thing as a single "official" symbol for Unitarianism. Each congregation is autonomous, and each congregation is therefore free to choose whatever emblem - if any - it wants to use to identify itself. But, many use one or other version of the Flaming Chalice and it is widely recognised.

At the same time, there are congregations within our denomination who prefer not to use the Flaming Chalice or any type of emblem, on their buildings or on their literature. Abraham Joshua Heschel declared: "What is necessary is not to have a symbol, but to be a symbol."

For those Unitarians who want to use a symbol, the Flaming Chalice is appropriate for several reasons, and it has a proud history, going back six centuries to the Catholic champion of the equality of all people and the freedom of the individual, the Czech Jan Hus; and including the work of the Unitarian Service Committee in war-torn Europe (including Czechoslovakia) in the 20th century. Our debt to that history is expressed in a sonnet by Coral Joyce Randall, "The Flaming Chalice", with which I finish.

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(Emphases by present editor)

The Flaming Chalice

Because we take from the pages of the
past

Our private faith, a faith that will survive

And triumph just as long as Good shall
last,

To influence our mutual, daily lives,

We keep our burning crucible aglow

With flames of freedom (an unfinished
task)

Lit by the voices of the long ago

That hid behind no timid, frightened mask.

They set no bounds on love and reason's
cause,

Nor blindly followed notions of the mass;

Their chalice flamed for God's unwritten
laws

Though they themselves were burned at
stake, alas

We take from larger vessels of great souls

Only as much as our small goblet holds.

Coral Joyce Randall



Gretta Vosper "On Trial" in the Uniting Church of Canada

Comments on the Report of the Conference Inter-
view Committee of its review of the ministry of the
Rev. Gretta Vosper

Eric Stevenson

(Eric is a member of The Centre for Progressive Religious Thought, for whose newsletter a version of this article was initially written, as well as a member of the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship.)

Unlike so many of our Unitarian forebears, Gretta Vosper opted to stay within the established institution in order to bring about change. We naturally feel immense empathy with her apparent failure to effect the institutional reforms that she deemed her search for truth demanded, plus the grievous personal loss she has sustained on paying the price for having taken her courageous stand. We extend our wholehearted support to and admiration for this modern heroine of religious progress.

Gretta Vosper, of the West Hill United Church in Toronto, Canada has been considered by the Toronto Conference to be not suitable to continue as its minister. Gretta is friend and fellow progressive of the Centre for Progressive Religious Thought in Sydney. The Centre sponsored her visit to its Gathering at Beecroft in April 2010 when she spoke on the topic, "Why the Way we Live is More Important than what we Believe". She is the author of two books: "With or Without God" and "Amen: What Prayer Can Mean". She is the founder and Chair of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, an organization that provides resources and support to those exploring the boundaries of Christian thought both within and outside of their congregations.

Notoriety in Gretta's denomination grew following an article, "Believing Outside the Box" published in The United Church Observer in 2005 in which her unorthodox beliefs about a non-interventionist God and the inspiration of the Bible were released. The article provoked a stream of letters to the Editor that continued for a full year alternatively vilifying her or lauding her honesty. Jack Spang labelled an attempt to question her as "a heresy trial", 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. More recent complaints about her beliefs were received by the Toronto Conference in 2015 which referred the matter to the Conference Interview Committee for determination. The interview took place in June last. The following disturbing details of Gretta’s “trial” (Jack Spong’s word) have been taken from the report itself.

Because so much of the accusation focuses on Gretta’s so called atheism, it is important to note that she only labelled herself at one stage as an atheist as a protest in support of those who had been unjustly persecuted. Her refusal to use the god word was not because of disbelief in “a power beyond us”, but because of the meaning given to it by the interventionist believers who were conducting her trial. Of greater interest to Unitarians was Gretta’s rejection of the doctrine of the trinity. Direct quotes of her responses to questions about the godhead are given in the appendix to this article.

The Report states that Gretta told the Committee that she did not believe in a Trinitarian God. Instead, by ‘god/God’ she meant what is created between people in relationships, but does not exist separate from us, and the construct is not divine. She said that she does not use the word ‘God’ because its use is a barrier to some people. She does not believe that Jesus was divine. He is not the Son of God. Jesus is not her Saviour. She said that she no longer calls herself a Christian. She does not believe that there is a Holy Spirit. She does not believe that there is a God who calls anyone to ministry. She does not administer sacraments. She does not consider scripture to be the primary source, but merely one source of information amongst many. She is no longer in essential agreement with the statement of doctrine of The United Church of Canada. Instead, Ms. Vosper said that her theology has evolved beyond the doctrine of the United Church.

The Report of the interview addresses at length, many other issues including Gretta’s belief and practice regarding the, Call to the Ministry, Baptism, Dealing with People of differing Beliefs, personal Mystical Experience, Conduct of Worship, Prayer, etc., etc. Her responses to these and many other aspects of

her work are available on the CPRT website.

But the interview did not finish there; the Report goes on to deal with a multiplicity of procedural issues arising from recommendations made in Gretta’s responses.

There is no doubt that the Committee had faithfully and thoroughly observed due diligence in dealing with her case. Their faithfulness to these regulations has in our opinion however, resulted in the crucifixion of a courageous servant of their church and follower of Jesus of Nazareth who, like Him has dared to demonstrate that it is more important what you do than what you believe. Consequently the enquiry began to get off the rails in the very beginning when the Toronto Conference issued the Conference Interview Committee with a mandate to determine Gretta’s suitability purely on the grounds of her breach of her theological ordination vows. The mandate specifically excluded any evaluation of her standards of practice regarding administration, community outreach, social justice, continuing education, leadership, pastoral care or self care. And the problem was exacerbated by the fact that the procedures of the institution were and still are regarded as inflexible in a rapidly changing world. The church accepted the decision of the Committee that Rev. Gretta Vosper was unsuitable to continue as minister of the United Church of Canada. Finally, Gretta urged the Committee to find that the way forward in the future is not by using “an aberrant disciplinary process”, but rather through collaborative effort to improve the Church.

APPENDIX.

History of Procedures

Gretta initially appealed the negative Ruling to the Judicial Committee. On March 17, 2016, however the Judicial Committee Executive decided that the Appeal did not meet the grounds for an Appeal as set out in *The Manual 2013* and therefore would not hear the appeal. Toronto Conference Sub-Executive decided to reinstate its review of Rev. Vosper’s ministry and on May 3, 2016 the Executive Secretary sent a notice to her setting out the process for the interview to be held on June 16, 2016. The notice set out the questions that she would be asked to affirm and advised that she might be asked questions of candidates for ministry at their final interviews for ordination, commissioning or admission.. Gretta was invited to send a written response that would be read by the members of the Conference Interview Committee before the interview. “Ms. Vosper’s submissions (176 pages) were received

on June 17th and distributed to the members of the Conference Interview Committee the same day.” On June 16th West Hill congregation sent written submissions that were distributed to the Conference Interview Committee the same day. On June 27th, West Hill also sent a petition in favour of Gretta Vosper and asked that they be permitted to address the Conference Interview Committee. That request was denied.

The Interview

(In reporting about the interview, the Conference Interview Committee has used the edited responses Gretta posted on her website. If there was no response posted to a question asked, the Committee has relied on its notes.)

Gretta’s admitted breach of her ordination vows was consistent with her admission at the trial that her theology had “evolved beyond” the old doctrines. (Eric)

The Committee proceeded to examine Gretta’s theological position and the Report records her answers regarding the following issues:

i. What is your understanding of God?

Ms. Vosper chose to answer this question using the words from the Basis of Union, section 11.3: “God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”. Ms. Vosper said that she does not believe in a Trinitarian God, composed of three persons equal in essence, a being who presides over earth from another realm, a supernatural one, from which it has the power to intervene in the natural world – capriciously or by design – by responding to our prayerful requests, or altering our minds and so, too, our actions, or intervening in the natural world with or without provocation or invitation in order to alter weather patterns, health, the accumulation or loss of wealth, the circumstances of birth including geography – a predictor of health and access to food and water – gender, sexuality, mental capacity, or beauty – all predictors of the power status and ease with which individuals will live their lives, **then, no, she does not believe in that at all. Ms. Vosper told the Committee that neither does she believe in a god of no substance who exists beyond the universe yet contains it, interpenetrating it in some incomprehensible way for some incomprehensible purpose.**

Ms. Vosper sees no evidence of such gods. And so she said that there is no reason to remain aligned with a doctrine that does not fit the contemporary and ever-evolving scientific understandings of the universe or ethical perspectives on human dignity and rights. **She also said that**

there is no reason why we should eschew the scholarship of the countless theologians who have argued for centuries, that the doctrine of the Trinity is unworthy of our intellectual consideration, let alone our allegiance. Ms.

Vosper said that there is no reason to require of anyone who comes to us for service of any kind, including participation in the creation of vibrant, meaningful communities, acknowledgment of or belief in Trinitarian or any other form of ecclesial language and the subsequent study and support they will require to move beyond traditionally held interpretations of that language with which they most likely arrive at our doors. She said that the only faithomable [sic] reason that the Church might consider holding to the doctrine of the Trinity and commencing an ongoing program of investigation of clergy that requires assent to that doctrine in order for their ministry to be considered effective is the maintenance of the United Church’s membership in the World Council of Churches. Ms. Vosper said that the work of ministry with individuals and communities of transformation is more integral to the work of the Church than membership in an organization.

Ms. Vosper said that even if she were given incontrovertible proof that a god does or gods do exist, the evidence of the cruel and capricious realities of disparity, tragedy, illness, and anguish in the world, and the truth that our world and our experience of it is wrapped not only in beauty but also in excruciating pain, would prevent her from worshipping it or pledging her allegiance to it, no matter the cost.

Ms. Vosper told the Committee that what she does believe has come to her through a heritage that is rich in church and in the United Church into which she was born and raised. She said: “It is rooted in my family that, like many families, transmitted positive values to its children. These same positive values have also been projected by humanity, alongside other, more dangerous values, to become the attributes of the transcendent, divine, supernatural beings that we have called gods. During times when social cohesion was crucial to the survival of small tribal communities, fear of those deities provided a powerful antidote to individual expression or actions that might threaten the community’s well-being – murder, theft, adultery, abortion, homosexual behaviours. These became offences against gods and came with god-sized punishments. Twinning social laws with supernatural beings may have been an evolutionary twist that provided for our survival. Ms. Vosper said that it does not follow, however, that supernatural beings provided the moral codes or values by which we choose to

She said that while the values instilled in her as a child were values reinforced by her church school and Christian upbringing, they are not values exclusive to that upbringing. And she said that there are no moral codes that have been formed by the mind of god. Rather she told the Committee, there is a morality that we have created and that transcends our personal circumstances. It is a morality that we have the responsibility to review and revise as we each see necessary for our wholeness and, she hopes, social cohesion, which is so integral to our well-being, our future as a species, and our impact on the future of all on the planet. **It is in these non-doctrinal things that Ms. Vosper said that she has faith.**

Ms. Vosper said that she believes in love and that for her, love is the most sacred value. When she calls something sacred, she said that she means that it is so crucial to our humanness, to our humanity, that we cannot risk its denigration, degradation, or destruction. To live without that sacred thing – in this case love – would mean we had repudiated our evolved and critically negotiated humanity.

Ms. Vosper said that what she understands about love is not a simplistic, self-serving love. Instead, she means a costly, challenging, transformative love that pulls us beyond the people we think we were, the people we may have been content to remain, in order that our humanity be more complex. She told the Committee that love refuses to count its cost, seeking, rather, to disperse that cost into community, pulling us toward one another as it does so and beyond the divisions that otherwise might leave us in isolation

Ms. Vosper said that there are religious texts and biblical stories that can be interpreted in the light of that kind of love, some of which may even seem to tell of the most complete embodiment of it that has ever walked the earth. These are questions of interpretation. She told the Committee that biblical examples are not integral to the understanding or the living out of love and that anyone, regardless of creed or ideology or even ignorant of such things, may still live in accordance with a costly love. Ms. Vosper said that she believes that the greater portion of humanity chooses to do so.

Ms. Vosper told the Committee that our Christian

forbearers were seekers after truth. She referenced Dean William Sparrow, who is said to have ended every lecture with the words: “Seek the truth, cost what it will, come whence it may, lead where it might.” She mused that Dean Sparrow was challenging his students for a life in the ministry that would not be compromised by the quitting of intellectual integrity. She suggested that he was coaching them to hold to what they were learning and to go out into ministry without forgetting to continue to learn.

Ms. Vosper said that the quest for truth is never over, and so it remains at the top of the list of those things in which she believes. Ms. Vosper said that she believes in truth and believes that it is important to seek truth, no matter where it comes from, no matter what we may lose in the process, no matter where we end up. She told the Committee: “It is my commitment to truth – both seeking it and sharing it – that has brought us here today.”

There are some who have argued courage is the greater virtue because it is required to live out any of the others, but Ms. Vosper said that she believes love badgers courage into being, and when love fails to do so, she believes that truth picks up the rant. She said: “Love and truth can exist without courage but almost as soon as one or the other emerges, courage is a must. Courage is a must if we are to do anything to protect those we love or to strive toward truth, no matter its cost or destination. Love without truth or truth without love can both deny wholeness.”

Ms. Vosper told the Committee that courage without either breeds indifference or savage violence. She said: “Violence bred by love and justice, is tempered by the very root of its action, which can only ever be to restore rights or to secure safety. It is in the interweaving of these three virtues that positive change happens, in our hearts, in our relationships, in our communities and in the world.”

It is these virtues – love, truth, and courage – that provide for all the rest upon which Ms. Vosper said that her ministry is built.

Ms. Vosper said: “All of these virtues can be found explicitly or implicitly in stories from the Bible, but they do not originate there. To suggest

that they did would be inconsistent with contemporary scholarship and dishonour the human story, both of which predated and ran parallel with its writing. To present them as having been created by a god and given to us is to refuse humanity credit for its most noble accomplishment. It also removes our right and inherent responsibility, as their creator and agent, to bring to the fore or limit certain of them as the needs of the human community evolve.”

She told the Committee that hope, as the promise of something we cannot assure, is deeply rooted in our Christian heritage. Ms. Vosper said that she does not speak of hope; she chooses to create, to accompany, to name, to comfort, to acknowledge, to embrace, to lament, to encourage, to convict, to trust again. She said that she cannot bring about a peaceful death with only hope. She said that she cannot mitigate the effects of corporatism, or global climate change with only hope; she cannot redress our tragic history with Indigenous peoples with only hope; and she cannot address poverty, violence, xenophobia, arrogance, or illness with only hope. Ms. Vosper said that only if she has a hammer in her hand, only if action congruent with our responsibilities as human beings to alleviate suffering or redress abuse is in the offering or underway, will she offer the word ‘hope’. She said that she will not offer hope to mollify or comfort when to do so does not alleviate pain or suffering, does not create right relationship, does not forestall death, but only pretends all these things might be achieved and so anesthetizes us to their reality with an illusion that comforts we who extend it more than those to whom we dispense it. Ms. Vosper told the Committee that she does not offer an empty hope and would not wish one offered to her.

The Interview Team asked whether hope, faith and justice were God. Ms. Vosper answered that she has stopped using the word ‘God’ because it is a barrier to participation in the Church. Instead, she speaks of who God is for her. Ms. Vosper explained that they do not sing sacred music at West Hill and she doesn’t use the word ‘God’ there.

When questioned, Ms. Vosper said that for her ‘God’ is what is created between us. Although we cannot measure or describe it, Ms. Vosper said that it is the power in relationships that is pure and strong, but she does not call this ‘God’. Ms. Vosper was asked whether God was anything more than a construct between two people. She answered: “No, I don’t believe so.” **She acknowledged that the construct has a power beyond us, but it does not exist separate from**

us. It is dependent upon us.

The Interview Team then asked if she believed in a metaphorical God. Ms. Vosper responded that she does not use the word ‘God’ because using archaic words is a barrier. Traditionally, the word ‘God’ is of a supernatural being. Ms. Vosper said that she no longer uses the word ‘God’ because she doesn’t believe in such a being. She would not use metaphors for God in worship.

ii. Who is Jesus Christ for you?

Ms. Vosper said that Jesus is a historical figure with healing skills who lived some time at the beginning of the Common Era. She said that the record of his life is spotty; he was an itinerant Middle Eastern preacher who managed to engage a group of people who were looking for the same things. Ms. Vosper said that she does not see Jesus as divine. She told the Committee that Jesus was not the Son of God and that Jesus is not her Saviour.

Ms. Vosper was asked whether she called herself a Christian. She answered that ten or twelve years ago she wrote two articles that were published side by side. One set out all the pluses of Christianity. The other set out all the negatives. Today, Ms. Vosper never calls herself a Christian.....

iii. What is your understanding of the Holy Spirit?

Ms. Vosper responded that the Holy Spirit is a construct of the early church that grew up to deal with the various factions in the Church. She said that there is no such thing as the Holy Spirit.

xii. Do you believe in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and do you commit yourself to God?

Ms. Vosper answered that if the Interview Team meant the Trinitarian God as she had talked about before, then no, she does not.

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## ***“We need not think alike to love alike”***

Even if the above words are an adaptation of a John Wesley quote and were never said by early Unitarian Ferenc David as often claimed, they do express how Unitarians relate to each other, as well as to people outside our spiritual home who may well wonder how we can have atheists in our membership as well as theists, deists, pantheists and agnostics. The following is a slight adaptation by your editor of a section in a Unitarian Universalist pamphlet: **Many Humanists find a home in Unitarianism and Unitarian Universalism. Some identify as atheist or agnostic, rejecting supernatural frameworks for creating meaning or morality. Some put their faith in the force of love or the spirit of life. Some find the sacred existing in the material world, with reverence for the intricate web of interdependence and interrelationship that defines life on Earth. All share a commitment to learn and grow in a spiritually-diverse community. Members of the Unitarian Universalist (UU) Humanist Association wrote: *We are “religious” in that we share with most Unitarian Universalists the natural human desires for a beloved and accepting community; a purpose greater than ourselves; rituals and practices that resonate with our common humanity and shared mortality; and opportunities to work with other tough-minded, warm-hearted people to do good in the world and to help one another attain the greatest possible fulfilment in life.***

Read more <http://www.uua.org/beliefs/who-we-are/beliefs/humanism>

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

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

***If you have a news item or written article you believe would be of interest to the congregation, we invite you to submit it for Esprit.***

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

***Do you have a topic of a spiritual / ethical 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. *Please see Caz Donnelly at the Sunday service*

**Fellowship contact 0466 940 461**