



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship
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Schedule of Services

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

10 January, Laurence Gormley: "**Some thoughts on New Year Resolutions**"

A light hearted look at our New Year Resolutions and what they represent.
How successfully do we embrace the unique opportunity we have each year
to overturn our old ways and start afresh.

17 January To be announced.

24 January, Colin Whatmough: "**A Natural Faith**"

How Darwinian evolution has transformed religion from traditional to liberal.

31 January , Jim Scarfe: "**H.G.Wells' View of Jesus,**"

This talk will be based on Wells's brief but pertinent account of Jesus in his "Short History of the World".

7 February, Ross McLuckie

14 February, Laurence Gormley

21 February, Janet Horton

28 February Jan Tendys

*Happy Christmas!
A baby is born
Crying out to God
Wriggly arms snuggle up
Like a koala.*

From 'Christmas Baby' by Rory Burg, age 8, "Poems by Young Australians" 5

Should we Legalise Drugs Globally?

Geoff Matthews

The catalyst for me presenting on this topic at our service on 13/12 was that I attended a speech by former police chief of Seattle on this topic in Sydney recently as part of his one week speaking tour of Australia. He is part of a group of ex-police in the US called LEAP (Law Enforcement Against Prohibition) of drugs, www.leap.cc, which includes ex police from other countries as well. I was truly captivated by what he had to say.

In my address, I drew from an extensive article by their president, retired narcotics undercover officer, Jack A. Cole, titled "End Prohibition Now!"

Some of the points I mentioned from this article were:

The first thing I need to tell you good people is that the US policy of a "war on drugs" has been, is, and forever will be, a total and abject failure. This is not a war on drugs, this is a war on people - our own people - our children, our parents, ourselves. Every president since Nixon has escalated this war and its unintended consequences but the term "war on drugs" was coined and created by Richard Milhous Nixon in 1968 when he was running for president.

One of the unintended consequences of the successful interdiction of large amounts of marijuana was that it caused many marijuana dealers to switch to hard drugs that were less detectable and far more profitable, pound for pound.

...in a few short years the price of marijuana... increased by 2,500%, from \$160 a pound to \$4,000 a pound.

Heroin users are 4 times more likely to die of an overdose today than they were in 1979.

A 2002 drug survey by the National Center on Addiction And Substance Abuse at Columbia University revealed that schoolchildren across the country say it is easier for them to buy marijuana than it is to buy beer and cigarettes.

The international illicit drugs business generates as much as \$400b in trade annually according to the UN International Drug

Control program. 8% of all international trade. \$400b is more than the GDP of over 200 countries, leaving only 25 countries that are not.

Alternative Drug Policy

1 End drug prohibition, legalize drugs. We legalize all drugs - so that we can regulate and control them and keep them out of the hands of our children. (My note, this is the main thrust of their argument. By controlling them, there is also a flow of the funds to taxes and those being able to be put back into control programs, instead of profits going to drug barons).

2 The US government should import or produce the drugs and control them for quality, potency and standardized measurement. This policy would virtually end drug overdoses.

3 There are many possibilities for how drugs may be distributed once they are made legal. They could be sold in package stores such as those selling alcohol in some states: stores with no advertising, where drugs are sold only to adults, and highly taxed. Hard drugs may be distributed via prescription by doctors.

Can giving free drugs to addicted people help end those addictions? The answer is Yes! In Switzerland, Holland, Germany and Denmark heroin users have been treated by giving them heroin. The country with the longest record (14yrs) is Switzerland. The outcomes of these policies is nothing short of amazing. In Switzerland, thanks to the quality controlled drug production, there hasn't been an overdose death related to this project since in 15 years. **So what are the outcomes of free governmental distribution?**

1 No profit motive for drug distribution

2 No individual selling drugs anywhere

3 Less people begin using drugs

4 No crimes committed to obtain drugs

5 No criminal association for drug users

6 No diseases passed by sharing needles

7 Users able to stabilize their addictions and get on with their lives

8 No shootings of drug dealers by other drug dealers

9 No kids caught in cross fire

10 No police killed fighting the drug war

11 No one killed by police in the drug war

12 No advertisements to aggrandize or romanticize drug use

13 Nobody will solicit one more drug user for any reason!

14 And no terrorists will make any money from illicit drug sales

4 Take a portion of the billions of dollars we save each year thanks to ending drug prohibition and redirect it.

The Netherlands decriminalised possession of marijuana... and allowed small scale sales of it in 1976. Yet use of marijuana.. in Holland is half the rate of use in US. Between 1982 – 2006, criminal justice expenditure in US on drugs was \$2.815 trillion tax dollars. In 2004, \$193.5 billion spent each year.

I closed with an Australian quote:

“Unlike alcohol or tobacco, heroin causes no ongoing toxicity to the tissues or organs of the body. Apart from causing some constipation, it appears to have no side effects in most who take it. When administered safely, its use may be consistent with a long and productive life. The principal harm comes from the risk of overdose, problems with injecting, drug impurities and adverse legal or financial consequences.” Andrew Byrne, GP, “Addict in the Family – How to Cope with the Long haul” – Redfern.

My view

I imagine the problem in Australia is quite large too, relative to the US. Other countries have tried to do something different and appear to be having some success. Let’s get the enormous revenue out of the hands of drug barons, with all those ramifications, and into govt. programs paid for through taxing their use. As LEAP says quite strongly, alcohol prohibition in the US did not work, drugs isn’t either.

This appears to be a fairly taboo topic in the US and here, but I believe needs to be more on the social agenda for discussion. There would be a lot of resistance I am sure, but we could start off small and progress from there, it would not be easy though.

What is happening now is clearly not working. I am a great believer in the saying – if you always do what you have always done you will always get what you always got.

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## **Comment**

**Jan Tendys**

The struggle for the decriminalization of marijuana and other illicit drugs seems to wax and wane. Perhaps a sign that it is again returning to strength is the publication of an article critical of present policies in Australia, “The Pleasure Principle” by Dr Kane Race, in SAM, Sydney Alumni Magazine, University of Sydney.

Race argues that the war on drugs is more a moral crusade than anything to do with public health. The state allows many forms of dangerous recreation, such as hang-gliding, football and mountaineering. Imagine the outcry if the state policed these in a way that made them more dangerous. Yet the manner of policing illicit recreational drugs does make them more dangerous.

Police patrols with sniffer dogs lead to patrons at dance parties etc downing all their pills at once to escape detection and thus risking overdose. The death in 2007 of a young woman who took a pill which she believed to be ecstasy but which was contaminated with PMA, a hallucinogen that can be lethal in certain cases, was highly publicized. Yet the police initially refused to release any identifying features of the pill. “Thus, rather than give consumers practical information that might help to prevent further deaths, the prerogatives of harm reduction were subordinated in typical fashion to moral politics,” says Race.

The state also allows the extremely health-endangering drugs of tobacco (highly addictive) and alcohol (which Race claims is much more likely to be associated with violent crime and aggression than “club drugs”).

My own view is that it is essential to pull the rug from under the feet of the criminals presently in control of the market, and make quality control possible by decriminalising these drugs,. But we cannot expect that we will then have no problems.

We know that the illicit drugs are often taken along with alcohol and we already have huge problems with alcohol. That is partly because no consistently serious attempt to deter citizens from alcohol drinking is ever undertaken since there is the organized power of the manufacturers, pubs and clubs ranged against it. Harm minimisation will need to be a massive campaign.

## **A Climate Hunger-striker Explains his Position**

**Copenhagen, December 17**

My name is Daniel Lau and I am now on my 35th day without food in protest at our leaders' collective inability to act in the face of humanity's greatest possible disaster.

Looking back at things it seems that my life priorities have changed drastically in recent years. Up until 2005, I had spent eight years working at one of the most aggressive emitters of CO<sub>2</sub> in Australia, a steel plant in Wollongong. Today, having studied the science and economics of global warming, I cannot feign ignorance. My hunger strike began as a rational response to inaction by leaders.

Martin Luther King once taught us that "a man who won't die for something isn't fit to live". This fast is for a cause that I would be willing to die for, but which is worth living for.

Taking action to help defend the survival of people, entire communities, nations and regions who have no choice but to suffer if our present environmental degradation persists has brought deeper meaning to my life. I'm not a spiritual person, but now, on my 35th day without food, I hear the cry of the billions I am standing with in my starvation.

My friends' and family's bewilderment, anger, and frustration at not being able to move me off the hunger strike slowly transformed into moral and emotional support. Their love and solidarity made me realise that my life is not mine alone. It intimately affects people back in Australia. And conversely, the millions suffering around the world affect me.

Although my decision to undertake this hunger strike was a deeply personal decision I do not feel alone. There are many others just like me, here in Copenhagen, along with those in Australia, the US, and the thousands from at least 25 countries around the world who have registered on our Climate Justice Fast website and facebook page. The fast has inspired youth from the global south in Copenhagen to call for a peaceful day of

global fasting today, Thursday 17 December. For some this will represent their 42nd day without food.

For the last six months I've been researching for a PhD in climate economics. It was while doing this research that I discovered the basic science of global warming. In the absence of urgent attempts to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions today, our planet will heat up to levels that will make it impossible to maintain human civilisation. Conflicts and diseases caused by greater climate variability are expected to erupt throughout the world as more farmland becomes desert and fresh water supplies dwindle. Based on estimates from the scientific community, strong immediate action on climate change is required.

Even more startling, the economics shows it is cost-effective. According to the UK's Stern report, and many other studies on climate change economics, the cost of fulfilling emission reductions necessary to avoid the most devastating effects of global warming — ensuring CO<sub>2</sub> levels do not exceed 350ppm in the atmosphere — is so little, that rich countries in 2050 would have to wait only one additional year, until 2051, to be as rich as they otherwise would have been, had they not been investing in clean energy.

Yet it seems our governments, and perhaps even us as individuals and societies in developed countries, have decided to ignore the devastating impact of our current, environmentally unsustainable lifestyles upon countless future generations of people merely because they do not exist yet.

More fundamentally, climate justice demands the following. Rich nations, comprising under one sixth of the current global population must at least take responsibility for their historical role in having emitted 40 per cent of the total emissions allowable before truly dire changes are caused to the natural system. At current CO<sub>2</sub> emission rates, we have less than 20 years left to become completely carbon-neutral, if that is at all possible. We must utilise our greater resources to act now so that innocent people do not suffer the catastrophic consequences of climate change.

If the present inaction of the developed world was not bad enough, Australia's present position on climate change is even more immoral. We emit the most carbon per capita in the world, make money from the coal we use and sell, and have tabled a pledge in Copenhagen that condemns many of the Small Island Developing States to death. These nations represent 20 per cent of all nations in the UN. Our carbon reduction proposals will not prevent the oceans from rising, swallowing hundreds of islands as the polar ice caps melt and the oceans expand. Nor will our proposals be enough to prevent the worsening consequences of climate change already being faced by many African nations.

When, because of desertification caused by global warming in sub-Saharan Africa, it is down to the last piece of bread between a family of eight, the situation is dire. But the value of my life and each of theirs is the same, and I have undertaken this voluntary fast in solidarity with these people who are involuntarily suffering, every day, because of climate change.

I joined this hunger strike with a vision of hope. This may sound contradictory because this indefinite fast threatens my health, and of course risks death. But some fasters have ended their fast — including Michael Morphet, 61, who was fasting on the lawn outside Parliament House in Canberra — after receiving medical advice. When told that irreversible damage to his body was imminent if he continued to fast, Michael took the rational decision to listen to medical advice.

In a way, his decision is emblematic of the one key demand all of the millions calling for action on global warming have asked for. Heed the scientific advice, reduce our carbon emissions, or risk the irreversible death of our planet.

From the online magazine Newmatilda.com

**From your editor:** Whether or not we endorse all Daniel Lau's argument, we can admire the sincerity of his protest. I will endeavour to find out its outcome.

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Common Dreams 2

"Living the Progressive Religious Dream"

Melbourne 15-18 April 2010

Keynote speaker: **Rev. Gretta Vosper**

From Vancouver Sun

Famous in Ontario for her in-your-face bluntness, Vosper frequently says her views could lead her into a "heresy" trial, even in the doctrinally open-minded 700,000-member United Church of Canada.

"I'm going to try to stop using the word god altogether. For now I'm going to use some other word -- maybe breath or love," she writes with characteristic aplomb, rejecting the all-powerful God of monotheistic traditionalism. (Douglas Todd, April 26, 2008).

From

<http://www.commondreams.org.au/home>
the Common Dreams 2 website

"To be Christian is not to believe in a certain set of doctrinal beliefs or participate in a special ritual; indeed these things would be anathema to an individual who was trying to get people to see and live with deep respect for one another's humanity.

To be Christian for me, is to do whatever it takes to bind me to a life lived in a radically ethical way. Considering how hard this is and will always be, I'll need all the help I can get. So will you".

Rev Gretta Vosper is a chair and founder of The Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity and author of the provocative, bestselling book [With or Without God: Why the Way We Live is More Important Than What We Believe.](#)

Other speakers include :**Hugh Mackay** a social researcher and writer who has made a lifelong study of the attitudes and behaviour of Australians. He is the author of 12 books, including five best sellers.

Rev Jo Lane the minister of the Unitarian Church of South Australia since September 2006. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in comparative religion, from the University of South Australia and a Master of Theology from the University of Liverpool.

Newsy Corner

Rev. Douglas Webster is recovering from a successful prostate gland operation. Unfortunately, he still has a foot problem that causes difficulty walking. He writes:

"We are still able to function fairly well locally and take part in local Probus activities including putting on shows, the last one was, "Peter Pan the Musical" Vina is Musical Director and I have had several "on stage" roles. Today (29th November) we had a Christmas Lunch in the Richmond RSL and sitting next to an Associated Professor and his wife who have friends who are "enlightened Unitarians" and Vina has become friends with a Bahai who also attends the Richmond Weight Watchers and she is keen for us to link up with other Bahais who live in Kurrajong Heights. So the New Years looks promising with better health and meeting and getting to know more people in our locality. Our best wishes to all members of Spirit of Life".

And Christmas greetings to Douglas and Vina from Spirit of Life .

Jan

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 JANUARY 2010

Please be sure Jan has your WRITTEN items by this date. Preferred method is as an MS-WORD or email to jtendys@optusnet.com.au

Hardcopy (or electronic media) submissions can be hand-delivered to Jan or posted to:

Spirit of Life
PO Box 1356

LANE COVE NSW 1595

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 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.