



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
22 Feb	Rev. Steve Wilson	Misunderstandings: What Jesus Gets Wrong: and We Get Wrong About Him. : This Sermon re-examines Jesus and his statements 2000 years later with the little asked question of what he actually gets wrong and right. Come for a funny, heretical, informative, and fresh look at Jesus. A scholarly and a "you only hurt the ones you love" review about someone who doesn't get it all right, but even when the historical record is screened for sap, seems to have great courage.
1 March	Janet Horton	Bookstore Religion
8 March	Rev. Steve Wilson	Gandhi, Globalisation and Workers in Trouble
15 March	Geoff Matthews	How is Your Soul?
22 March	Rev. Steve Wilson	The Hope of Chaos
29 March	Rev. Steve Wilson	Superstar Servetus, Someone Ought to Make a Movie In the heart of the Reformation, with everything on the line, The Goliath of Geneva- Calvin, took on our little David like underdog Michael Servetes. If you know history you know this plot line, is a good one. Come here a movie preview, a real UU thrill ride with an action hero as exciting as Matt Damon.

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

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 IN FEBRUARY

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

COMMITTEE NEWS

I wonder if all members know how our Emergency Fund works? It has two components. The smaller of these is a component for giving cash help in case of emergencies suffered by a member. The classic case comes from another church where a pensioner was unable to pay his electric light bill. So far, we have not had a situation of this type in Spirit of Life. However, I would like to pay tribute to Ross McLuckie and Laurence Gormley for using their professional and business skills and resources to turn around what was very much an emergency for one member.

The larger component is for public emergencies of the flood/fire/famine type both here and overseas. We've been able to put useful amounts towards cyclone relief (twice) and for promoting the "porridge plant", an easily grown South American plant which can be cultivated by those who are very weak eg HIV and Aids sufferers.

The most recent disbursement was to the overseas aid organisation Plan for microfinance. Yes, after finding out how hard it is sometimes to give away money when you have a particular goal in mind, we did finally contribute to microfinance in Africa. Our next microfinance effort has had to be postponed due to a need to contribute on behalf of the Fellowship to the bushfire crisis this year. You will hear more of that in services.

We do not devote the collections given at services to the Emergency Fund. The need to pay the rent is too pressing for that. We also need money for growth. A Fellowship like ours will die if it does not grow; and advertising, a new website, brochures etc do not come cheap.

Instead, we fundraise separately for the Fellowship's Emergency Fund. We have tried raffles in the past but what seems to suit Spirit of Life best is partying. That's where Candace shines. Her home and her cooking skills have been available to us at various times during the years. Our welcome to Steve very recently was accompanied by a discreet call for donations by Candace. We don't want to be, as the kids today say, "in ya face" asking for money all the time. However, I'm sure you all want Spirit of Life to have a social service aspect to what we do - especially in such calamitous times.

The committee will soon be voting on how much of the Emergency Fund should be sent to Bushfire victims. If you would like to make a contribution to the fund specifically for bushfire victims, please pass it to a committee member at the service. We will then let the membership know how much we were able to contribute.

Not the Loss alone,

Not the loss alone,
But what comes after.
If it ended completely
At loss, the rest
Wouldn't matter.
But you go on.
And the world also.
And words, words
In a poem or song:
Aren't they a stream
On which your feelings float?
Aren't they also
The banks of that stream
And you yourself the flowing?

~ Gregory Orr ~

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Jan,

Your article in this issue (January) of *Esprit* about Conor Cruise O'Brien has helped me to be more lucid concerning the description of my journey into progressive religious thought. Why do I feel that my loving relationships are incomplete when I am not forthcoming about what I really believe? The tension which I experience has been hard to explain. Am I afraid of disclosing my non-believing self to my believing friends and relations? Should I adopt an evangelical stance about where I stand in regard to my wider community of colleagues and associates?

My unease is not because I am constrained to force change upon my friends of a different world view. Nor am I dissatisfied with any kind of human encounter which is founded in compassion and crowned with practical love. It is because in those peace at any price relationships I am a kind of split personality.

O'Brien tells of the inner freedom which he enjoyed when he returned as a political activist to his beloved country of birth. After years of silence concerning his personal rejection of traditional Catholic belief, and his impunity as a divorced member of the community he was at last able to declare himself as he really was, to his own people. This coming out closed for him "a schism in the soul". He was now, not only at peace with himself; he was at liberty to campaign much more effectively for justice and social change than ever before.

I suspect that I share this feeling of having been set free with many of my friends in Spirit of Life Fellowship - a community in which our souls can be one, as well as being at one with each other.

Eric Stevenson

Eric,

I'm glad you appreciated the article on O'Brien. He was a man of good character, a weighty tribute in my book. Sometimes he misjudged a situation. With the wisdom of hindsight we can see he was wrong in wanting to permanently exclude Sinn Fein from a role in government.

He was nevertheless a salutary role model in so many situations, not least in being a politician who was truthful about his life stance and beliefs.

Character is surely one of the outcomes we as Unitarians should be hoping to build for ourselves and for our children.

Jan Tendys

An Important Day:

On Feb 12, 1809 both Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln were born. Wow. Isn't it strange that that fact is not more broadly known. Not discussed by astrologers, as proof of something. Isn't it funny that there are no efforts to have your children born on Feb 12th, especially now that we are now celebrating the 200th anniversary of this Important Day. Isn't it odd that, Barak Obama supporters who know he idolizes Lincoln have not talked more about this, or have I just been asleep.

I was up last night in my little new Kirribilli home thinking about the two of them. See I love Darwin and Lincoln in part because they are both so Unitarian and Universalist in value and spirit.

They both expressed a belief that revelation is not closed. They both were liberators whose life work took the steps forward that free us from the bonds of Biblical literalism. Whether it was by re-writing the creation story, or moving us beyond an acceptance of slavery because "the bible in places allowed for it"

And at the same time, Lincoln's profound and prophetic language in the Emancipation Proclamation stirred the souls of moral men, and ever since it has been considered wrong for one group of humans to enslave another.

Lincoln was also rallying the courage to tell the nation that "they, we were going to be better than we think we are or should be, and that we are going to do it together."

It is a touch odd that their birthdays come in The US's African American history month, for they both went a long way to saying that they are us. Darwin was in England also a fervent critic of slavery. He said it was simply "contrary to the natural moral sense." And took on the scientific racists who argued that the human races were actually separate species. Darwin staunchly supported the abolishment of slavery and Britain's Great Reform Act of 1832, which led eventually to extended voting rights to millions of formally disenfranchised citizens.

While Charles was putting the science pieces together, Lincoln across the pond was persuaded to adopt this new theory of evolution, because it confirmed his belief that everything in the universe must occur by natural causes.

Like many Unitarians and Universalists across the years, both Charles and Abe would have to spin and face charges of heresy. Many people don't know it, but Lincoln as a young man wrote a book against Christianity arguing that the Bible was not divinely inspired and that Jesus was not the son of God. This would be better known if he did not heed warnings from his friends that it was dangerous to make such arguments in public.

Darwin took similar positions, although he began life as an orthodox Christian, he eventually reached a point of being a skeptic or agnostic. He was particularly disturbed by the unmerited suffering of human beings--such as his child Annie, who died when she was 10 years old--as casting doubt on the existence of an all-good God.

I honor them both.

Separately:

I just want to acknowledge how grateful I am to be here with you, if for only a brief time. What a blessing. This small fellowship with it's smart leadership have been gracious and accommodating in not only word, but deed. I couldn't be happier to be here.

Rev. Steve Wilson

A BLYTHE SPIRIT

At the age of nineteen Sandy Blythe's future seemed assured - he had a promising career as an Australian Rules footballer ahead of him, and was studying for a university degree. But his life was suddenly and irrevocably changed when a car accident left him a paraplegic.

This is what he wrote about his time in a rehabilitation ward, when the truth of situation began to sink in:

"Yet it was at the gym that the real horror of a fresh spinal injury became apparent to me, taking my emotions beyond breaking point and further. Big boys don't cry, or at least nineteen-year-old men are not meant to but they do. Through-out my time in Wards Seven

4

and Eight, but particularly in quiet moments whilst in Ward Seventeen, I cried and cried and cried. For many reasons. For the things that I had lost along with the use of my legs, such as the dream of playing AFL football and the freedom of running along a beach. For my shattered self-image, which had been transformed back to that of a newborn baby. For my new embarrassments. For all the frustration of no longer being able to do the simple things such as picking some-thing up from the floor, dressing myself or even getting in and out of my wheelchair. I tried whenever possible not to cry, but on many occasions I was not successful. Other people cried more, still others cried less. Everyone who was going through the ward as a patient had lost different things, but each of them had lost so very, very much." Page 61, "Blythe Spirit" - (Pan Macmillan Australia, 2000).

By way of contrast here is what Sandy wrote about celebrating the attainment of his undergraduate degree. By this time he was accomplished with the use of a wheelchair.

Page 111

"As the year drew to a close, the final activity for the Individual Conditioning class was running from the college to Mount Buninyong and back. Again, with much of the terrain unsuitable for my track wheelchair, I participated in a unique manner, as much a means of celebrating nearing completion of my degree. I organised a lift up to the top of the mountain, transferred into my track chair, and strapped my hands in preparation for the impending descent, all with a wry smile at the thought of my classmates toiling and sweating their way up the mountain. As the first of the runners reached the top I pushed off, gaining speed as I flew down through the twists and turns of the mountain road surrounded by the natural greenery and trees. Exhilarated, with the wind rushing through my hair, enveloped in the odours of the bush and with tyres screeching on the damp bitumen, it was a moment of the utmost freedom, and for once I had the advantage! I made it to the bottom invigorated, glowing and alive!"

Sandy Blythe was the first wheelchair bound student to complete a physical education degree and later a Master's degree. He co-captained the Australian men;'s wheelchair basketball team which won the gold medal at the Atlanta Paralympics. He represented his country at four paralympics. He captained the team at the Sydney 2000 Games and was much sought after as a motivational speaker and adviser on help for the disabled.

Sadly, this account of his life cannot end on that triumphal note.

"Farewell to a champion athlete" is an article by Andrea Petrie published in The Melbourne Age. Nov. 25, 2005 following Sandy's death. Some excerpts from that article:

"We all have our limits and mine had been well and truly reached."

Those were the words champion international athlete Sandy Blythe penned in a goodbye note to his family, friends, colleagues and fans before he died last week.

"After becoming sick in 2001 ... I tried to find answers despite so many medical investigations. It all became clear in August 2004, when Chronic Fatigue Syndrome revealed its sinister self.

5

"Since this, my time 'up' has diminished to at best an hour in the mornings and about 40 minutes in the afternoon. This, together with an inability to sleep, chronic prostatitis ... kidney problems and paraplegia, left no hope," he read.

"This was the hardest, bravest decision to make and one that I didn't want to make. I love life, not the hell that it had become."

He expressed his thanks for the support he had received throughout his illness and urged people to "make life fun because you never know when something so horrible will make you have to throw your hand away, no matter how much you didn't want to".

He concluded: "Hopefully I will see you all in a better place some day in the far future." His partner, Paula Coghlan, a leading Australian women's wheelchair basketball player, gave a moving tribute to her "soul mate".

So how do we view his life and death? He contributed hugely to the life of the society in which he lived as sportsman, educator and breaker of barriers. For a highly competitive, sporting person, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome came as the cruelest of blows, accompanied as it was, not surprisingly, by depression.

Sandy Blythe had shown enormous courage in his life and surely it is no shame that he made the decision he did. Nevertheless, haunting questions remain: was there any intervention, any new direction that could have helped? Was depression the real villain and CFS secondary? Why do we feel his death is tragic, if it really was release from "hell"? Yet that is what we feel in this case. One can't say "Well, he had lived a good, long life." He was still a young man.

Suicide is a continuing challenge for any religion or philosophy of life. Meanwhile we welcome research that is making life better for sufferers of CFS and depression. <http://www.mecfs.org.au/> ME/CFS Australia is the National Association for Myalgic Encephalomyelitis / Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. ME/CFS Australia is dedicated to increasing the recognition and understanding of ME/CFS, fostering bio-medical research into its causes and treatment and providing support for people with ME/CFS through its affiliated Societies. The Black Dog Institute is an educational, research, clinical and community-oriented facility dedicated to improving the understanding, diagnosis and treatment of mood disorders. <http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>

Contributed by Jan Tendys

I love prayer

I Love prayer. 10 Seconds of it at a time usually.

It befalls me in the car, turn the radio down
when you look at children suffering, or at road kill.

It is the time when I am most essentially me. And that time when I am in relationship with a holy I cannot see or touch, or care to explain.

Think of it as prayer when you dance...

Know it to simply be the thing that is so essential that it must be said, thought or felt,
and yet so that it must go somewhere important even if you don't know where.

Rich and unexplainable, I don't care where you think it goes, let prayer break and heal your heart all at once.

Forgive yourself that you pray most earnestly that the plane you are on not fall out of the sky.
Pray selfishly even though there are no guarantees that it will work,
Know that the quiet moments that we are all in this room are our collective prayer.

You can want us all to get along, but pray that
this community love one another.

That we can be a place that like the game where peoples arms can't bend to their own mouths, learn to feed each other.

For a long moment of silence let's be vulnerable, honest, humble, and in so be great.

Amen

Rev. Steve Wilson

Kindness

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you every where
like a shadow or a friend.

~ Naomi Shihab Nye ~

" I think that I shall never see
a billboard lovely as a tree"

Ogden Nash

Ross McLuckie remembered this early classic for our monthly green touch.

A Seeker

A young woman went to the draper's shop in a country town and asked to see material suitable for a nightie for her trousseau

The sales assistant, an older woman, showed her some suitable materials. The bride-to-be made her choice, ordering a large amount.

"Will you really need that much, dear?" asked the assistant, "You're quite slim!"

"Oh, yes, I want a very full nightie" replied the young woman. "You see, I'm marrying a Unitarian Minister, and he believes seeking is as much fun as arriving."

(Based on a joke sent by Linda Horton as translocated by Jan Tendys)

Modes of communication

The pulpit – one-sided. Needs accompaniment of appreciative or rejecting murmurs. No.. no shouts of "You or The Committee or Someone or Something can get st..... ed!"

Candle-lighting – not intended for political harangues, complaints about other members or other forms of pot-shotting; nor for routine announcements. With these restrictions in mind..... Enjoy.

Phone calls - lack body language. Too easy to imagine body language.

Emails – lack body language and tone of voice. Cause riotous imaginings. Please sprinkle generously with smiley faces, delighted faces, pained faces, grimacing faces, appalled, pathetic or just plain mystified faces. Thank you. This has been a public service announcement.

Jan Tendys

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.sydneynunitarians.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.