

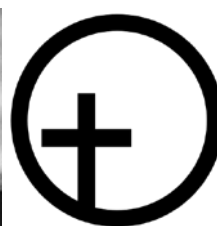


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**Journal of the Australia New Zealand
Unitarian Universalist Association**

Autumn 2016



UNIVERSALIST ANNIVERSARIES

This year marks the sesquicentenary of the incorporation of the US Universalist General Convention in 1866, which later became the Universalist Church of America. A global history of Universalism has already been printed in this journal (see the June/July 2011 issue) but this article will focus on the denomination in the US and its early leaders, some of whom also have significant anniversaries in 2016.

Historically, the concept of universal salvation (or universal reconciliation) was a repudiation of the Calvinist doctrine that only a small number of predestined individuals (the Elect) would go to Heaven. Before there was a Universalist denomination, that principle was espoused by the General (as opposed to Particular) Baptists in the UK and its American colonies. Also receptive in the latter were Quakers and certain minority sects from Germany and Central Europe. The first Universalist missionary in America was probably the physician, George de Benneville (1703–93), who arrived from Europe in 1741 (i.e., 275 years ago) and preached to German immigrants in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

However, American Universalists see their history as commencing with John Murray (1741–1815, pictured top left), who had been a follower of James Rely (1722–78) in London. Rely founded the first Universalist churches in England and wanted the untrained Murray to become a preacher, but that was the least of his intentions when he and his wife came to America in 1770. However, he was persuaded to deliver a sermon at Good-Luck Point, New Jersey, while his New York-bound ship was becalmed on a sandbar, which famous event is commemorated to this day.

Murray then became an itinerant preacher, travelling between New Hampshire and Virginia, in the course of which he encountered a Relyite study group in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1774. They invited him to stay as their preacher and, while that body is considered to be the first Universalist church in the US, it may not have had an actual meeting house until 1780. Certainly, their beliefs were not popular with the Parish Board and it took a lengthy court case before the church was recognised and exempted from taxation.

One of the issues in the litigation was that the 'Independent Church of Christ' lacked a denomination, which Murray then endeavoured to establish. There were other proto-Universalist groups scattered across the country that had little or no knowledge of each other, so he and Elhanan Winchester (1751–97) of Philadelphia attended a convention in Oxford, Massachusetts, in 1785 that resulted in two new churches being incorporated in the region. The Oxford church became the base of Adam Streeter (1735–86), the first American-born Universalist minister, who helped Murray establish the First Universalist Church of Boston.

The next step was a meeting in Philadelphia in 1790, where 17 delegates from eight congregations drew up the articles of faith and an organisational plan based on strict congregational polity. This Philadelphia Convention was to meet annually, as the New England Convention in Oxford already did. The latter adopted the Philadelphia structure at its 1794 meeting, which was addressed by a young preacher from New Hampshire named Hosea Ballou (1771–1852, pictured top centre). Possibly the first Universalist to reject Trinitarianism, he sat on the committee at the Convention in Winchester, New Hampshire, in 1803 that produced a more inclusive profession of the faith to encompass the growing diversity in the member congregations.

By this time, there were some 50 congregations in the country and the New England Convention changed its name in 1804 to ‘The General Convention of Universalists in the New England and Other States’. This was the first step toward a three-tier structure of national, state and regional Conventions that still left plenty of autonomy to the local societies. Ballou moved to Boston after John Murray’s death in 1815 to lead the new Second Universalist Society and founded the weekly *Universalist Magazine* in 1819.

Ballou became the principal expositor of Universalism in the US through his prolific writing. In addition to three books, he wrote about 10,000 sermons as well as hymns, essays and polemic theological works. Under his influence, the Universalists came to reject all aspects of Calvinism and even trinitarianism. Politically, they opposed slavery and supported the separation of church and state. (Ballou also founded a Universalist dynasty, as two of his sons and three nephews became ministers: these were, respectively, Hosea Faxon Ballou and Massena Berthier Ballou, and Hosea Ballou 2d, Levi Ballou and William Starr Ballou. A third son, Maturin Murray Ballou, wrote his father’s biography.)

The General Convention must have had a national presence well before its incorporation, as the Universalist Divinity School was opened at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, in 1856. That was followed by the Crane Theological School at Tufts College in Medford, Massachusetts (1869) and the Ryder Divinity School at Lombard College in Galesburg, Illinois (1885). (Actually, the Universalists founded the latter two colleges, as well. Lombard College merged with the Unitarians’ Meadville Theological School in 1930 after the latter moved to Chicago from its original location in Pennsylvania.)

An early graduate from St. Lawrence was Olympia Brown (1835–1926, pictured top right), who enrolled there in 1861 after even the Unitarian divinity school would not accept women. She completed her studies in 1863 and became the first fully ordained female Universalist minister in the US. She served at churches in Massachusetts, Connecticut and Wisconsin over 25 years, rescuing two of them from imminent collapse. However, she left full-time ministry in 1888 to become an activist for female suffrage and women’s rights for the rest of her life. Her activities were rewarded, as she lived to see the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1919 and to vote in the presidential election of 1920.

Other prominent Universalists of that era were Judith Sargent Murray (1751 – 1820), writer and women’s rights advocate; Phineas Taylor Barnum (1810–1891) of circus fame; and Clara Barton (1821–1912), founder of the American Red Cross. It should be added that the aforementioned Hosea Ballou 2d (1796– 1851) was a Universalist historian and the first president of Tufts College. However, the most famous minister was Thomas Starr King (1824–1864), whose evangelical and political work in California has been described at length in an earlier edition (see the Spring 2011 issue).

In 1921, the General Convention decided that it needed an official presence in the national capital, so funds were approved to build the Universalist National Memorial Church in Washington, D.C. Two Universalist churches were already there that dated back fifty years, but this one was seen as a headquarters. The building opened in 1930, though services had been held at another location since 1925. By this time, the Convention had 88 female ministers, more than any other denomination in the country.

The move to Washington headquarters may have anticipated the most significant development since 1866, when the General Convention changed its name to the Universalist Church of America in 1942. The new logo (at the right on p. 1) with its off-centre cross seems to signify that, while it was still an essentially Christian church, there was plenty of room for other religious viewpoints. Those would surely have included the Transcendentalist deism of the mid-19th Century Unitarians, as at least some Universalists had been affected by that philosophy even in those times.

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ICUU NEWS

Conferences

Projects in Latin America

Other News



As was detailed in the previous issue, the biennial ICUU Council Meeting and Conference will be held over 15–22 July 2016 at the Mennenrode Centre near Nunspeet in The Netherlands. (The first two days will be for a Ministerial Conference.) A detailed program and registration form can be found on the ICUU website (www.icuu.net). The 'Early Bird' fee of \$US 365 covers all meals, accommodation and transport to/from Nunspeet train station. Pauline Rooney, retiring Vice-President of the ICUU, was able to book a Qantas flight between Adelaide and Amsterdam via Dubai for \$1881 return and is on a 'fare watch' for any more cheap fares that may be announced.

Pauline reminds us that U*U groups in better-off countries have been asked to sponsor Third World participants whose national bodies would otherwise not have the resources to send them. These are typically emerging groups that will benefit immensely if their delegates make personal contact with the larger U*U world. The ICUU has issued an appeal to this effect and any money at all would be very much appreciated.

The conference organisers have also invited suggestions for workshops that will suit the theme, 'Winds of Change'. Our delegate, Henri van Roon of Auckland, has proposed that we design a workshop on climate change, based on the outcomes of the session on that topic at the last ANZUUA Conference. (It is usual for the proposer(s) to be asked to lead the workshop.)

Before that, a planning meeting called Essex 2 will be held on 08–11 March in Boston. Named after the conference in Essex, Massachusetts, in 1996 that founded the ICUU, representatives from the major groups around the world and a few emerging groups will review the whole concept of the ICUU twenty years later. A few of the original founders will be there, as well as most members of the Executive Committee, the outgoing Executive Secretary, Rev. Steve Dick, and the Executive Director, Rev. Jill McAllister. Presumably, any structural changes they recommend will be put before the Council Meeting.

The ICUU has long been aware of small U*U groups in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Costa Rica, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina. Some 130 Latino U*Us have signed up for a newsletter and a website has been set up on FaceBook. A project worker has been to see them and some resources are being developed by a liaison between the ICUU, the UU Partner Church Council and the UUA, all of whom are contributing.

The goal of this working party is to support and give a voice to the Latino community by collecting, creating and distributing materials in Spanish and English; to develop online resources for emerging groups such as an Order of Service, opening and closing words, and basic information about our faith; and to develop online religious education materials. There is also a planning workshop for Cuba of 25 participants who are part of about six smaller groups.

The good news is that the Hungarian Unitarian Church (which encompasses both Hungary and Transylvania) has just celebrated the 448th anniversary of the Declaration of Religious Freedom and Tolerance (also known as the Edict of Torda) on 13 January. This commemorates the proclamation by Prince John II Sigismund in 1568 that Transylvania would have no official state religion and all denominations were free to do as they saw fit. The celebrations took place in Torda and in the Unitarian capital of Kolozsvár, featuring worship services and concerts.

The bad news is that the situation in Burundi continues to deteriorate, as fighting between government forces and armed resistance fighters has taken a heavy toll. Though they were never involved in politics, the Unitarians there became embroiled to the point that the ICUU had to evacuate many of them, including their minister, Rev. Fulgence Ndagijimana, to Rwanda. The church in the capital, Bujumbura, continues to function under tight security and it can only be hoped that pending visitations by the head of the African Union and the Secretary-General of the United Nations will achieve at least a ceasefire.

SEMILLAS DE PODER – SEEDS OF POWER
The IWC's Gathering in Bolivia, 12–15 November 2015

By Renee Hills

Olga Flores Bedregal carried the glass vase around the circle and each woman poured in water as she voiced her hopes, joys, sadness and inspirations. The vase was absolutely brimming when Olga reverently placed it on the table, saying it now contained our collective blessings. She reminded us of the many qualities water brings into our lives: healing, refreshing, sustaining, cooling, purifying, relaxing, releasing of emotions and beautiful expressions of nature, as in the sounds of waves or rivers. We should love and respect water, she said. This was a UU Water Service with a difference.

Thirty-two UU women from North America, Europe and Australia met with 35 UU and liberal religious Bolivian women, passionate about the environment, social justice and women's rights, at the historic Gathering in the subtropical Yungas region of Bolivia. Organised by the International Women's Convocation, the conference theme, *Mujer, Tierra, Cambio Climatico y Spiritualidad – Women, the Earth, Climate Change and Spirituality*, attracted a diverse group of amazing women, representing grassroots organisations and individuals working to advance women's rights, environmental issues and justice for indigenous people in Bolivia.

It was Olga Flores' idea to come to Yungas. She wanted to bring the Bolivian women to a beautiful place in nature, away from the crowded, sometimes dirty, cities where many of them lived. A human rights activist and leader of the small UU community in La Paz, Olga first connected with the IWC when she attended their first Convocation in 2009 in Houston, Texas. The idea of a Bolivian women's gathering took shape after Olga addressed the IWC Annual Meeting at the UUA General Assembly in Salt Lake City later that year, where an Action of Immediate Witness was approved for her struggle to declassify military archives in Bolivia.

Each day began with a welcome to the sun, followed by Tai Chi and simple worship. The first day's stone ceremony honoured the Earth. Each woman placed a stone, saying where it came from and what it represented to her. Water, as mentioned, featured on the second day and Air on the final day, together with the Fire of our collective goodwill and commitment for change generated by rich shared experiences.

Thought-provoking presentations by Carmen Capriles, founder of *Reacción Climática*, and Kiyomi Nagumo, Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN) Coordinator for the region, revealed the challenges faced by Bolivian women. Olga Flores called for women to stay connected to their spirituality as a way of combating the irrational demands of an increasingly materialistic and capitalistic system that was damaging the environment. Dr. Susan Walsh, Executive Director of the UU Service Committee, presented their Seeds for Survival project, which works with small-scale family farmers – many of them women – in the poverty-stricken, mining-damaged rural mountains in Potosi Department.

The Gathering's success will be measured by outcomes from the Global Sisters process: the deep group sharing and discussion between women from all walks of life and vastly different cultures. Women's leadership and empowerment, water shortage and environmental education emerged as priority issues from the six Global Sisters groups. My group was a mix of Bolivians, North Americans and me. The Bolivians spoke Spanish, which most of the rest of us did not understand. Skilled translator, Michelle O'Brien, spoke English translations into our earpieces and translated English speakers into Spanish. Facilitator Eleana Flores Bedregal (Olga's sister) was one of six specially trained in the process before the Gathering. The IWC's attention to translation and facilitator training was commendable.

After sharing our primary concerns and stories, we selected the single most important topic to action, through an effective pair-wise comparison process. Our group settled on Women's Empowerment. I was shocked at the discrimination, paternalistic attitudes, and domestic violence described by the Bolivian women. Work-place harassment seems common, especially if one runs for political office. Government action reflects paternalism; for example, many communities now sport bright green astroturf soccer fields, spectator seating and floodlights, all built with public funds. Olga and Kiyomi both raged against such facilities that favoured men and boys, while the villages lacked running water and flushing toilets and women died in childbirth at home because they lacked access to health care.

Our group decided we must continue to communicate and support each other. Our Facebook group, *Semillas de Poder (Seeds of Power)* has become the post-Gathering connection tool. (The name derives from a Mexican proverb: "They tried to bury us, but they didn't know we were seeds.") You are welcome to join us at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1504421383185807/>.

Our other actions included:

- investigating the IWC model of leadership training and capacity building, already used so effectively in Transylvania;
- sexuality education through UUs' *Our Whole Lives* program;
- campaign training for women who wanted to enter politics;
- being open to receiving and giving support to each other.

There was such a buzz and exciting cross-fertilization of ideas when all hopes and actions were shared on the last morning. The feeling of optimism, shared understanding and determination to change the lot of women in Bolivia was palpable. We had truly been inspired and transformed as we shared and learned about each other's lives.

For me, the only Australian, the Gathering was an unforgettable experience: smiling, welcoming Bolivian faces; stumbling conversations across the language barrier; exposure to the realities of women's lives in Latin America; new UU friends from around the globe; and a deep respect for the IWC women who accomplished so much with so little. And I still have a few drops of the water that Olga collected that second day, representing our collective experiences and blessings to share with our Brisbane Fellowship in Australia when we celebrate our Water Service early in 2016.

FOOTNOTES

The International Women's Convocation (formerly the International Convocation of UU Women) works in conjunction with the ICUU, though most of its funding appears to be donations from the US. Please see their website: www.intlwomensconvo.org for further information.

Renee Hills is President of the Brisbane UU Fellowship and her husband, James, is the previous Secretary of ANZUUA. In the process of attending the Gathering, they went on tours before and after that took in Chile, Peru and Bolivia. The itinerary was detailed in the previous issue but Renee has put together an impressive pictorial weblog which can be read at: <http://www.travelpod.com/travel-blog/rhills/2/tpod.html>.

Not to be outdone, James has placed three photo galleries at: <https://goo.gl/photos/AzjmGHEGdExdY56A9>; <https://goo.gl/photos/HwU4x9UirToJm71V8>; and <https://goo.gl/photos/BWSbmq1jESD5CvB26>, which can be viewed at any desired resolution. He has also made two videos on YouTube – one on the Gathering (https://youtu.be/zy6_J4ws1pU) and one on the trip (<https://youtu.be/hm8Q1m5evRA>).

Renee has some further news for us – in her own words: "I was thrilled and humbled to receive an invitation from IWC Board members to join their Global Sisters Leadership Council. The GSLC helps provide expertise and guidance to the Board for current and developing programs and assists in recruiting new partners to expand IWC's international connections. Which brings me to this point. I would love women in our congregations and in ANZUUA to know more about IWC and the work it does. Like many UU organisations, they punch way above their weight in what they achieve with limited resources.

An excellent way to learn more about the organisation is to join in the global webinars that usually focus on one of their projects. The next one is Sunday, 20 February, beginning at 9 a.m. Sydney time, and the topic is the Gathering in Bolivia and its outcomes. I am beginning the discussion with an overview of the conference. Other presenters will be talking about outcomes and what happened with the delegates who went to the Paris climate change conference after the Gathering."

The other presenters were the aforementioned Carmen Capriles of *Reacción Climática*; Susie Safford and Pan Godchaux of the UU Congregation of Petoskey, Michigan; Erin Beasley, Climate Change Program Coordinator of *Fundación Gaia Pacha*; and Mary Ann Bernard of the UU Church of Berkeley, California. (The next webinar on 03 April will focus on the IWC's very successful micro-loans project in Uganda.)

TRAVELS WITH RENEE

Marvelous, Magical Machu Picchu (08 November 2015)

The bus was coated in condensation as we made our way up the slow gravel winding road to Machu Picchu. Our wonderful guide, Rony from Andean Travel (tour organiser), began an explanation of this amazing place by stating that it was first discovered in July 1911 by a Yale professor, Hiram Bingham. He'd been searching for an Incan city he'd heard that had been established in the jungle after flight from the Spanish. During his investigation, he heard other stories of an amazing hilltop city and he repeatedly asked to be taken there. Finally, one Indian agreed to take him for 1 sol (Peruvian peso)! He returned the following year with a team of American anthropologists.



This impressive city was the closest Inca city to the Amazon jungle and appears to have been a place where 500–1000 lived, worked, farmed and worshiped in the many temples. The whole site is an amazing feat of construction: terraces to strengthen the hillsides, extensive drainage works under the buildings (accounting for 80% of the site construction). Perhaps it was a satellite city built with the intention of moving into the lowlands. Whatever the reason, the city appears to have been suddenly abandoned.

Excavations revealed mostly female skeletons buried, not in tombs as was the normal practice, but on terraces and roadways. It appears that most of the men may have been away fighting in the 1536 Inca rebellion against the Spanish, led by the last Inca king (a puppet figure for the Spanish). When the rebellion failed, it is possible that the inhabitants fled into the jungle with their leader. Whatever the reason, Machu Picchu was suddenly left and the Spanish never found it, which accounts for the intact nature of the buildings, compared to other Inca sites we have visited. The Spanish were intent on destroying the Inca culture, so they destroyed as much as they could, often down to the massive stones in the foundations of the walls.

I loved the way the mist wafted down from the clouds and blew in and around the buildings. We followed our incredibly informative guide from a high vantage point down through one of the gates into the city proper. We saw the impressive sundial, 'Hitching to the Sun', as translated from Quechua, which showed the winter and summer solstices; the workshops where weavers, metalworkers and weapon makers worked; the temples of the Sun, Air, Water and Earth (*Pacha Mama*), all clustered together around natural rock formations; ceremonial water fountains and sophisticated drainage systems.

We had adequate time to walk around and marvel, walking the uneven paths, climbing up and down in the bright sunshine after the clouds lifted. We decided not to climb Wayan Picchu (the mountain next to Machu Picchu) where the granaries were kept. We were told it was not a track for those afraid of heights and most of the time the peak was shrouded in cloud. James and I did try to walk to the Inca Bridge but, in the end, ran out of time after walking uphill on a strenuous path.

One of the most amazing things about the construction is the way it has withstood centuries of heavy seasonal rain – approximately 70 inches falls between November and April. The whole site is an engineering marvel that leaves intriguing hints about this impressive civilisation. One wonders what would have happened if the Spanish had not arrived hell-bent on imposing their version of Christianity. Perhaps the Incas would have developed a system of writing and we would have a much better understanding of their life and times.

Salt, salt and more salt (19 November 2015)

Our first stop on the way to the salt lake was the Train Cemetery. Apparently, Uyuni used to be a major train repair shop when the railway line ran further south and north right to La Paz. The dead engines accumulated here. The guide seemed quite proud of them in her quaint Bolivian way and wasn't impressed with the suggestion that they be melted down and made into something useful!

Then it was on to a small 'tourist trap' – a collection of market stalls filled with brightly coloured Andean souvenirs situated outside a salt factory. Raw salt collected from the lake, where it has been heaped to dry, is shovelled into a metal tray and three fires lit beneath it to 'roast' it. The salt is then graded and sealed in plastic bags with an open gas flame. This salt is only for domestic and industrial use, as it is not pure enough for export. Only the people who live in this village are allowed to collect salt from a 5 km radius from the edge of the lake. The lake itself is a national park.

I succumbed to the bright colours and bought another scarf. Then it was on to the salt proper and miles and miles of the thrumming of our Toyota 4x4 drive tyres on the large polygonal salt-crusted shapes, accompanied by loud Andean pipe instrumentals chosen by our driver.



We stopped for lunch at the edge of an extinct volcano, next to a green soak and brackish water (fresh water springs flow from the mountain). Our six drivers and two women we had carried with us set about erecting a tarp between the vehicles, setting up tables and providing a beautiful lunch of roasted chicken and sweet potatoes, complete with tablecloths, plates and cutlery. Soon we were feasting in style on a stark salt plain.

The volcano beckoned with its bright orange crater and steep golden fields enclosed by stone fences. The guide said the fields were set up by the Spanish and were used to grow quinoa. We drove up close and, honestly, I could not see how the fields could be used for anything except llama grazing. They were absolutely full of stones and clumps of spinifex type grass. However, before we left we saw worn furrows in one such field, so perhaps they are used sometimes.

On the side of the volcano was a cave which is an Incan burial site. Inside were several mummies, placed in foetal position. Two were discovered there and others were brought there to create a cemetery. It was eerie and intriguing to wonder how these people lived and why they died. The guide gave the rather unsatisfactory answer that there was no money for further research on the mummies, such as age dating, etc. At least, the mummies are secured in the cave and admittance is with a guide.

Our convoy then headed to a small island, clearly floating on a mirage haze in the distance. The walk to the coral-encrusted peak was challenging, due to the altitude and also a fierce 37 km/h wind that almost buffeted the iPad mini out of my hand when I tried to take a photo. The island is covered in a peculiar cactus and the late afternoon sun lit the thorny brushes with a golden glow. The peak affords an amazing 360 degree vista of the vast white expanse of the salt lake and an immense blue sky beginning to be streaked with thin white cloud.

Our final stop was back towards Uyuni at a place where the salt is heaped in small piles to dry. As the sun dropped, so did the temperature and the wind drove the cold through our jackets and beanies. But the sunset was worth every discomfort. The clouds blazed gold and finally the small salt piles reflected a soft pink hue in the surrounding water. It felt as if we were in a vast cathedral, and we were very privileged to experience such beauty on the last official day of our tour.

PACK UP YOUR SINS AND GO TO THE DEVIL



Oh, I got a message from below,
'Twas from a man I used to know,
About a year or so ago,
Before he departed
He is just as happy as can be,
I'll tell you what he said to me,
He said, If ever you get heavy hearted,

Pack up your sins and go to the devil in Hades,
You'll meet the finest of gentlemen and the finest of ladies,
They'd rather be down below than up above.
Hades is full of thousands of Joneses and Browns,
O'Hoolihans, Cohens and Bradys,
You'll hear a heavenly tune that went to the devil,
Because the jazz bands, they started pickin' it,
Then put a trick in it,
A jazzy kick in it.



They've got a couple of old reformers in heaven,
Making them go to bed at eleven,
Pack up your sins and go to the devil,
And you'll never have to go to bed at all.

If you care to dwell, where the weather is hot,
H-E-double-L is a wonderful spot,
If you need a rest and you're all out of sorts,
Hades is the best of the winter resorts.
Paradise doesn't compare,
All the nice people are there,
They come there from ev'rywhere,
Just to revel with Mister Devil.



Nothing on his mind but a couple of horns,
Satan is waitin' with his jazz band,
And his band came from Alabam', with a melody hot.
No one gives a damn if it's music or not,
Satan's melody makes you want to dance for ever,
And you never have to go to bed at all.

Irving Berlin (1922)

The Universalists might have been more inclined to believe in Hell if they were told it was like this. Indeed, people as various as Mark Twain and Bernard Shaw have commented that Heaven is surely a boring place – Twain wrote: “Go to Heaven for the climate, Hell for the company”. You can hear the song by searching the title on YouTube (www.youtube.com).

Most people have heard of Irving Berlin (1888–1989), the legendary Jewish-American composer and lyricist who produced 1500 songs in his lifetime, including the scores of 19 Broadway musicals and 18 Hollywood films. His real name was Israel Isidore Baline and his family arrived in the US from Russia in 1893. They had a very hard life on the Lower East Side of New York City and he had to leave school at a young age when his father died. It is said that he became interested in music while selling newspapers outside saloons.

Baline joined a street busking group and later became a ‘singing waiter’ at the Pelham Café in Chinatown, where he taught himself to play the piano after hours. Ironically, when his first song was published in 1907, a printer’s error rendered his name as ‘I. Berlin’ and the name stuck. In a similar vein, his instrumental version of ‘Alexander’s Ragtime Band’ in 1911 was not a success but, when he added lyrics to it, he started a whole new dance craze that swept the nation.

VERSOS SENCILLOS (SIMPLE VERSES)

*Yo soy un hombre sincero
De donde crece la palma,
Y antes de morirme quiero
Echar mis versos del alma.*

I am a truthful man
From where the palm tree grows,
And before I die I want
To share the poems of my soul.

*Mi verso es de un verde claro
Y de un carmin encendido.
Mi verso es un ciervo herido
Quien en el bosc' busca amparo.*

My poems are of a clear green
And of a flaming crimson.
My poems are a wounded fawn
That seeks refuge in the forest.

*Todo es hermosa y constante,
Todo es música y razón,
Y todo, como el diamante,
Antes que luz es carbón.*

All is beautiful and constant,
All is music and reason,
And all, like the diamond,
Is coal before [it is exposed to] light.

*Con los pobres de la tierra
Quiero yo mi suerte echar.
El arroyo de la sierra
Me complace más que el mar.*

I want to throw in my lot
With the poor of the earth.
The rivulet of the mountains
Pleases me more than the sea.

*Busca el Obispo de España
Pilaras para su altar;
!En mi templo, en la montaña,
El álamo es el pilar!*

The Bishop of Spain
Seeks pillars for his altar;
In my temple on the mountain,
The poplar is the pillar!

*Y el alfombra es puro helecho,
Y los muros abedul,
Y la luz viene del techo,
Del techo de cielo azul.*

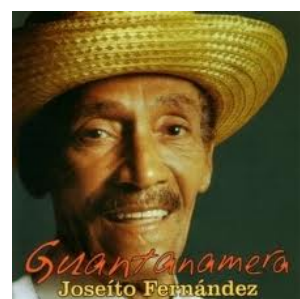
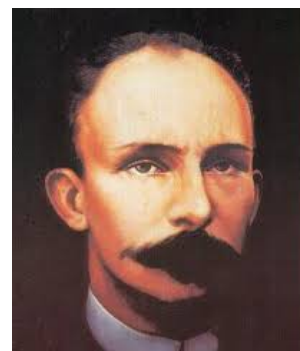
And the carpet is all fern,
And the walls are birches,
And the light comes from the ceiling,
The ceiling of blue sky.

*Yo sé de un pesar profundo
Entre las pinas sin nombres:
!La esclavitud de los hombres
Es un gran pena del mundo!*

I know of one deep suffering
Among the nameless griefs:
The enslavement of men
Is the great tribulation of the world.

*Yo quiero, cuando me muera,
Sin patria, pero sin amo,
Tener en mi losa un ramo
De flores – ¡y un bandera!*

I want, when I die,
Without homeland but without master,
To have on my tombstone a bouquet
Of flowers – and a flag!



José Martí

This seems a suitable item to go with the South American content, even if Cuba is not part of that continent. Most of our readers should recognise the first two verses from a popular song called 'Guantanamera' that was recorded by Pete Seeger and then by The Sandpipers. The music is usually attributed to José Fernández Díaz (Josieto Fernández), a Cuban radio announcer who probably wrote it in 1929. All three versions can be viewed by searching the title on YouTube (www.youtube.com).

However, the verses were written by the Cuban poet, writer and revolutionary, José Julián Martí Pérez (1853–95), who died in combat with Spanish troops. Born in Havana, he had several poems published by the age of 15. At 17, he was imprisoned for subversion and then sent to Spain in the hope that he would regain his loyalty by studying there. Instead, he continued to campaign for Cuba's independence and, unable to return there, lived in Mexico, Guatemala, the US and Venezuela between 1874 and 1895.

During that time, Martí worked as a journalist, a translator, an academic, a diplomat and a publisher. His collected pamphlets, essays and articles fill fifty volumes, and he also wrote a novel, poems, a play and even a children's magazine. The verses above are selected from a collection he wrote in the US in 1891.

“LIGHT! MORE LIGHT!”

By Rev. Rob MacPherson

[Text of an address to Adelaide Unitarian Church on 20 September 2015.]

On Wednesday of this week, the Vernal Equinox will occur. The sun will shine directly on the Equator, and we will have about the same length of light and dark, day and night. Is it me, or can this cosmic inevitability not come quickly enough? I’ve lived here 16 years, and maybe it’s me, but has anyone else found this winter in particular to be a long, cold, lonely winter, full of gloom and brooding and flu? There were times I thought I’d just never be warm deep in my bones again – no amount of thermostat twitching or hot baths could make it so. I know – our relative comfort is a First World problem. But your sense of well-being or lack of it can, well, colour and shape everything else, all your thoughts and actions.

However, there’s more to the change of season than just physical comfort levels. *Beyond Blue* reported a larger than usual spike this winter in cases of seasonal depression. And this should hardly surprise us – there has long been connection between the presence of more seasonal light and your metabolic serotonin production and vitamin D level, and the resultant feelings of well-being. It has been argued that the preponderance of Spring in European and English art and literature has much to do with how long and rotten European (and especially English) winters are, and how unwittingly depressed its residents must have always been before they had a name for it. Come the Vernal Equinox, though, and people shed layers of clothing, aired out long-shut-up dwellings, letting light bathe their bodies and enter their homes. And, of course, the new slant of light upon the Earth lifts bud and flower out of seemingly dead land as if by magic. New life stirs in the new angle of light. More light, more light, we cry: body, heart, mind, and soul.

J.M.W. Turner was called the great painter of light. He earned his considerable reputation by capturing the essence and nuances of sunlight, capturing its elusively ethereal and ghostly presence, capturing them in gross, earth-bound materials: These paintings of light, after all, are not light: they are gummy oil-pigment and crisp sheets of linen canvas. On his deathbed, Turner is said to have cried out these last words: “The sun is God!” So moved was he about how light infuses our world, our eyes, our feelings, our bodies, our very consciousness itself. In Italy, centuries earlier, da Vinci had the same thought: “I could wish that I had such power of language as should avail me to assure those who would set the worship of man above that of the sun. Those who wish to worship man make a huge error!” Light’s life-giving power and unfathomable mystery and glorious ubiquity make it very hard not to be awed by it. And awe, as we know, is a condition of what have been called ‘religious experiences’. The greatest German poet, Goethe, felt the same:

*"Light! more light! the shadows deepen,
And my life is ebbing low,
Throw the windows widely open:
Light! more light! before I go.*

*Not for greater gifts of genius;
Not for thoughts more grandly bright,
All the dying poet whispers
Is a prayer for light, more light.*

*"Softly let the balmy sunshine
Play around my dying bed,
E'er the dimly lighted valley
I with lonely feet must tread.*

*Heeds he not the gathered laurels,
Fading slowly from his sight;
All the poet's aspirations
Centre in that prayer for light.*

*"Light! more light! for Death is weaving
Shadows 'round my waning sight,
And I fain would gaze upon Him
Through a stream of earthly light."*

*Gracious Saviour, when life's day-dreams
Melt and vanish from the sight,
May our dim and longing vision
Then be blessed with light, more light.*

(‘The Dying Words of Goethe’ by Frances Harper.)

If that appeal for light sounds like a prayer, it is. Our felt attachment to and worship of light is deep in our consciousness. Indeed, even before and apart from the Abrahamic religions, solar god and goddesses were abundant worldwide. This ubiquity and plurality of these visible personifications of light expresses some sort of primal, felt connection between the dappled and rippling light that permeates the world and our human awareness of being alive in this wonder-filled cosmos. We may take it for granted, just as we do air – but try to imagine life without either.

The connection between light and our consciousness is very real, exists on a real, material level. As NASA astronomer Michelle Thaller puts it: “We are dead stars looking back up at the sky. Every single cell in our bodies contains elements created in the burning centre of a collapsing star – from the iron in our blood to every bit of calcium in our bones and keratin in our hair.” So there’s a fundamental connection between light and what we are. Sometimes dramatic solar events make this interconnection more evident and present.

For example, activities like solar flares and solar eclipses cause profound changes in the Earth’s magnetic field (something we also don’t see). And this solar/magnetic activity is known to affect human consciousness. Solar flares affect the central nervous system; thus, all brain activity (including equilibrium), along with human behaviour and all psycho-physiological (mental-emotional-physical) responses. So, maybe these ancient sun-worshippers and great artists were onto something, trying to give a name, a face, a personality, to anthropomorphize an unfathomable mysterious force into Gods – solid, familiar and comprehensible – to raise to worth and celebrate.

Mysterious, I say: Light is still not well understood because it takes on the mutually exclusive physical properties of wave and particle, matter and energy. You could say it’s both, which is to say it’s kind of neither one, so it’s this ‘third thing’ we can’t really account for. More strangely, the famous double-slit experiment shows that light changes between wave and particle according to whether it’s being observed or not. How does it *know*? So light has something to do with the observer, and this suggests that subject and object – the observer and the observed – while seemingly separate, are interdependent in ways we can’t even begin to fathom. As one physicist put it: “You can’t explain this with common sense and logic. If you can, there’s a Nobel prize waiting for you.”

But wait – the physics of light gets even darker! The word ‘photon’ is used to try to describe the dual nature of light – as a packet of waves. Now, these bad boys are truly spooky. If you take a twinned pair of these and shoot them away from each other at the speed of light, they will mimic each other’s behavior at the same instant – that is with zero time delay—that is, in *no* time, less than the time it takes for light to travel the distance between them. Remember, the speed of light is supposed to be both constant and an absolute limit, nothing is faster than it. Except the information travelling between photons. Whatever information they share at opposite ends of the universe is not localized; that is, light information is independent of space and time.

How can photons be ‘conscious’ of each other’s behavior faster than the speed of light? It suggests that not even matter behaves materialistically and that the interdependent web of existence we UUs have as a basic cosmological principle is deep and ubiquitous and very, very real. If you’re beginning to suspect that the properties of light revealed by Quantum Physics provides a common ground on which science and spirituality meet, you’re far from alone.

Yes: the more you look into light, the more blinded you get. So much paradox, so much improbability, so much to wonder at. For example, if it were possible for you to travel at light’s speed, time itself would stop for you. Past, present, future would be one-and-the-same, all at once, an eternal now. So light itself is outside time and unconstricted by space. Being beyond time and space was once thought to be the condition of the Gods.

I’m not a scientist, but I do read a lot of this material. Maybe your sensibilities incline (as mine do) more to the artistic rather than scientific. You want beauty and paradox and nuance? Light is, and is not, personal – impersonal in that it shines endlessly and everywhere, alike on the just and unjust. Personal in that each person’s experience of it is uniquely their own, just as with all human perception. There’s something out there beyond our senses called light, and not dependent on being sensed, but we also know that no one sees the same thing the same way. We know light has an infinity of different manifestations in the universe – stars and glowing gases everywhere and yet is the same in its essence – light is always light. Though the ancients worshipped a single source, the sun, *our* sun is but one light source, one lamp, channeling the same universal light. Many have seen this as a metaphor for the diversity of religious experience – in the words of the poet Rumi: “Our lamps may be different, but light is the same everywhere.”

So: light is absolute and relative, inherently contradictory, interrelated with the observer, manifest in a multiplicity of forms but ever the same, beyond logic and reason, beyond space and time, yet very real. It is everywhere and at the same time un-locatable. And there is no real explanation for any of these characteristics of light. It just “*is* that it is”. If it could talk, it would say as YHWH did from the Burning Bush when asked ‘who are you?’: “I am that Am.”

But we can pin it down a bit, yes? We can pinpoint when and how light began, can't we? It all started with the Big Bang, when the universe began from a single, infinitely dense point that exploded, creating space and time, and the energy released expressing itself as light. Except, maybe not, actually. I won't bore you with the details, but the latest equations in theoretical physics seem to show the universe as more of an endlessly flowing river than one big Roman candle that somehow got lit 13 billion years ago. When you think about it, the 'singularity event' was always a problem with the Big Bang – which just only ever said that it happened, not why, not how the fuse got lit, not how the infinitely dense small thing *got* there, what was there before?

Traditional science that tries to have a grand theory of everything says this: "give us *one free miracle* (e.g., the Big Bang) and we'll explain *everything* else from that". The Big Bang has been a robust model, but robust models merely provide the basis for better ones. The latest models suggest something very different to a big explosion of light – a shining, swirling universe with no beginning and no end – the alpha and the omega in one. Again, the division between science and spirituality appears gossamer-thin, full of wormholes.

To perceive light is to partake in more than our common-sense, material view of the world – to perceive any light is to be a time traveller. Any light that reaches you from the stars is telling you – not what is happening – but what has happened long ago. And light doesn't end with your perception of it, but keeps going forever. To be *in* the presence of light is to be outside space and time. And if we are *made* of the stuff of light, does this not also mean we, on some level we can't perceive, are ourselves beings outside space and time, always shining in an infinite array of endlessly changing forms? We each are *a* light in a shining universe. And though the lamp of our life here will end one day, we will shine on, elsewhere.

Reports from people who have had near-death experiences seem to suggest so. Their testimonies have in common a warm distant light that grows and draws us in to become one with it. You wanna talk feelings of well-being? The felt qualities of being absorbed into this light are unconditional love and joy. Something in our poetic imagination has always sensed this. Not at all by coincidence, I think, Dante's final poetic vision in the 'Paradiso' section of his great work, *The Divine Comedy*, is uncannily like the near-death experience so often reported, and as equally hard to put into words, though he was a poet. He reports his vision of approaching heaven thus:

My sight...was penetrating deeper and deeper, into the beam of the Highest Light, that in itself is Truth. My vision then was greater than our speech, which fails at such a sight... O Supreme Light, who lifts so far above mortal thought, lend to my mind again a little of what you seemed then, and give my tongue such power, that it might leave even a single spark of your glory, to those to come: And so...I dared to endure it longer, that my gaze might be joined with the Infinite Value.

In its depths I saw in-gathered, and bound by Love into one volume, all things that are scattered through the universe, substance and accident and their relations, as if joined in such a manner that what I speak of is One simplicity of Light. I think I saw the universal form, of that bond, because, in saying it, I feel my heart leap, in greater intensity of joy.

O Eternal Light, who only rest in yourself, and know only yourself, who, understood by yourself and knowing yourself, love and smile...the Love that moves the Sun and the other stars.

Last week we talked about humanity's tendency to anthropomorphize God, to understand God in human terms, understanding JC not so much as a way of making God earthly, but evolving us earthly beings into a more God-like consciousness. We focused on the entirely mythic figure of JC, as a man trying to evolve himself into a humanly living incarnation of divine Love. Anthropomorphizing is seeing the mystery as ourselves.

But these *anthropomorphic* ideas of God are the ones rightly pilloried by atheists as entirely improbable, as projections of our flawed and limited selves, which they kind of have to be. I mean, if there is an ultimate reality, do you really think it's, for example, *gendered the way we are*? And more philosophic notions of God (which UUs have latched onto) as Tillich's 'Ground of Being' or Moltmann's 'Source of Life' haven't really caught on – a language of specialist academics and nerdy clergy.

But if you were looking for a better way of thinking about God than a humanised or philosophical one, I'd want a way of understanding God that is both absolute and relative, manifest in a multiplicity of forms, but ever the same, beyond logic and reason, beyond time and space, it is everywhere and at the same time un-locatable. Something nurturing life that has always been there, and is never going away, and something I'm somehow

part of, and will return to and will come forth from again and again, without end. And yet something very, very sensually real. I don't want the supernatural God, but one that feels as natural as dappled light through leaves. In spring.

So when in these warm months to come you walk in light or bathe in sunlight, which is, after all, but one lamp of the great light itself, you're home. So, welcome, spring. Welcome, O supreme light. Welcome and amen.

[Rev. MacPherson is minister of the Adelaide Unitarian Church and, though a native of the US, he trained for the ministry at Unitarian College, Manchester. He has previously been an actor on the stage, TV, radio and film, as well as a Senior Lecturer in Communication and Media Studies at the University of South Australia.

This rendition took more than the usual amount of adaptation because the actual address was a PowerPoint presentation. A podcast of the original can be seen at: [http://unitariansa.podbean.com/e/light-more-light/.](http://unitariansa.podbean.com/e/light-more-light/)]

ANZUUA NEWS

Our president, Peter Abrehart, is now recognised by the federal Attorney-General's Department as ANZUUA's representative for the purpose of nominating Unitarian celebrants in Australia. (There is no provision on the national list of celebrants for the 'UU' designation.) However, these celebrants are listed by state and Peter will normally authorise inclusions and exclusions on the recommendations of the member groups. Any questions he may have regarding a nominee's suitability will be referred to the Executive Committee.

ANZUUA's annual subscription to the ICUU was requested to be paid by 01 June. As a Contribution Band 1 organisation (Full Member in a high income country), our dues are the greater of \$US 0.80 per adult member or \$US 500. It was decided to send twice that amount (i.e., \$US 1000), as was done last year. However, these dues from the member groups really only provide for the organisational structure and even the \$US 41,000 raised in last year's appeal did not cover all of the ICUU's expenses.

On a related matter, the ICUU's new website is up-and-running, and your editor and Rev. Rob MacPherson of Adelaide have been nominated to provide material from ANZUUA to it. Anyone else who is interested in being part of this should contact the ANZUUA Executive.

The recordings of the 2015 ANZUUA Conference have turned out to be too voluminous for normal transmission (including to the website), mainly due to the audio content. Peter Abrehart means to see if they can be transferred directly to the Melbourne church's website while James Hills will attempt to reduce the files from a USB stick.

While James and Renee Hills were in South America, Rev. Rob MacPherson conducted a service and workshop with the Brisbane UU Fellowship. That was attended by two American ladies who have founded a UU Fellowship in Darwin, where the US military community should be a fertile recruiting ground. The UUFD is now listed on the ANZUUA website and Rev. MacPherson will bring them a strategic plan when he visits Darwin in the near future.

There has been some discussion of ANZUUA affiliating with the Australian Council of Churches, due to our mutual interest in human rights issues. This, in turn, could lead to member groups joining the Councils of their respective states. Peter Abrehart was to meet with the Victorian Council of Churches in February to find out what the application process is. If it turns out, as some have suggested, that the Councils do not accept non-Christian members, it should still be possible to work with them on causes they have in common. Certainly, the VCC was a major force in last year's ANZAC Peace Coalition (see next article).

Following her trip to South America (see pp. 4/5), Renee Hills has suggested that ANZUUA might make use of the 'Our Whole Lives' programme on human sexuality. Developed by the UUA and the (very liberal) United Church of Christ, this has four levels of instruction for children, teenagers, young adults and older adults. The matter has been referred to the member groups and, given sufficient interest, an OWL 'Train the Trainers' session could be organised in Australia and/or New Zealand led by operatives from Honolulu. Any expressions of interest should be sent to Renee via ANZUUA (please see last page for how to do this.)

REPORTS FROM MEMBER GROUPS

Adelaide UC had a Spring Fair on 21 November, with a variety of stalls selling second-hand books and clothes, plants, and art. It also featured afternoon tea, children's activities and even a choir singing Christmas carols. While it was not meant to be a fundraiser – the main aim was to engage with the community – it did raise about \$1500. On 13 December, they had Multifaith Sunday, where people of several different religions made a contribution to the service, followed by a lunch where attendees brought food to share.

During January, their guest speaker was Natasha Davis, CEO of 'Trees for Life'. This is a South Australian organisation that seeks to re-vegetate farms and bushland, and care for native vegetation. At the end of that month, they had their annual Water Communion, where everyone poured a small amount of fresh water representing what they had been doing during the holiday period into a communal bowl.

The service on 07 February commemorated the 200th rug created by their knitting group, 'The Ruggers'. These rugs are given to 'Wrap With Love', an Australia-wide organisation that provides warm commodities to disadvantaged people. Some of their members also participated in several Australia-wide vigils for refugees, called at extremely short notice.

Also worthy of note, their little Shady Grove chapel in the Adelaide Hills celebrated its 150th anniversary as a place of worship on 06 December 2015. Originally built as a school for the children of local Unitarian farming families and their neighbours, it is thought to be the oldest such place with a continuous history of usage in the Southern Hemisphere.

Auckland UC have been raising their public profile by participating in protests against the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement and in the Hikoi (Walk) for Homes march. The demonstration for Climate Justice was the largest in Auckland on any issue for some time. Members of the Peace and Social Justice Committee spoke during a service that resulted in tripling their membership and the Management Committee has now designated the offering on the third Sunday of each month for Peace and Social Justice actions.

On the last Saturday in November, they had their annual Service Auction, the primary fundraiser of the year, and close to \$5000 was raised. Their Christmas Eve service drew a capacity crowd, most of whom stayed for the light supper provided afterward.

During January, their extensive building renovations were completed. These involved a new accessible toilet in the foyer, rebuilding the stairway to code, installing new fire detection and alarm systems, reinforcing the sanctuary floor, and installing new fire doors and fire walls – all of which have made the church safer and more inviting. During this same period, work was done to raise approximately \$30,000 for a new up-to-date sound system.

February being the local Pride Month, AUC had two services led by transgender people about the issues and challenges that they face in their transition. Members of the congregation also walked in the Pride Parade on 20 February with the church's banner to support the LGBTQ community.

Brisbane UU Fellowship wish to thank the Adelaide church for making Rev. Rob MacPherson available to them in November (see previous article), which their members found very inspiring. Their member, Rob Hill, took the next service and they were glad to have him back after his long stint of heavy study for a PhD.

After a planning session to map out the services for the next quarter, their meetings resumed on 14 February with a Water Communion service. The Committee meeting in March will focus on the sharing of pastoral care phone calls and follow-up contacts between services.

During 2015, their KIVA funds contributed \$1,900 in 71 loans across seven countries, mostly in Southeast Asia – the Philippines, Vietnam, Samoa etc. They continue to sponsor a UU student in the Philippines who is doing agricultural engineering.

First UU Fellowship of Melbourne (admitted to ANZUUA in October) continue to hold monthly meetings, though these have been moved from the second to the third Sunday of the month. These typically start with a meeting of their Committee, proceed to a shared lunch and finish with a service at 2 p.m. They meet at the Multicultural Hub, where they are trying to shift to a room with a better street presence.

Melbourne UC's end-of-year concert on 13 December raised almost \$1000 for the Interfaith and Community Peace Coalition (formally ANZAC Centenary Peace Coalition). Working closely with a large number of Interfaith and community groups, particularly over the past 12 months on the question of war and peace, has been very rewarding and shows great promise for future work. The Climate Change rally in Melbourne on 27 November was around 50–60 thousand strong with claims that it, along with London, were the biggest rallies worldwide. There was a good Unitarian presence, judging from reports at the Sunday service.

The service on 29 November marked MUC's 163rd anniversary and featured special guest Rev. Eric Heller, whose address was titled 'Jesus Wept'. Eric is an American minister who served the Adelaide and Sydney churches in the previous two decades, while pursuing a PhD in South Africa in between.

The draft of their second major research project under the general theme of 'Equality and Democracy' has been completed – deals with the privatisation of public utilities/assets and follows on from the very successful paper, 'Auditing the Auditors', published over 18 months ago. It is anticipated that the new paper will be launched in March, with strong support from MUC's friends in both Interfaith and secular organisations.

Given the extensive use of the Church facilities, they are looking at radically upgrading their audiovisual capabilities. Several alternatives have been studied and the final decision will be determined by a number of factors, not the least of which will be the financial outlay. Such an upgrade would add to the existing recording studio and printing facilities that have proved to be a great asset to the Church.

Perth Unitarians had a Uniting Church minister, Rev. Karen Sloan, as a guest speaker in November, who spoke on her spiritual journey that ended with walking the *Camino de Santiago* pilgrimage route in Spain. Their final meeting of the year was on 20 December, with Rev. Peter Ferguson speaking on 'Tales of Christmas – including the story of the kidnapping of the Baby Jesus from the Christmas Creche'. That was followed by a Christmas luncheon at the Captain Stirling Hotel.

Their first speaker in 2016 was Gordon McDonald with the topic "My journey in search for God, Love, Knowledge and Truth." That was a fascinating story of a Catholic upbringing, 15 years as a Hindu priest, a few years with the International Christian Embassy of Jerusalem (ICEJ) and a Masters degree in theology there. That research at first hand from the actual source of Jesus' teachings changed his view of Christendom into something much deeper and more universal.

On 07 February, Rev. Ferguson spoke on 'Islam and Islamism', distinguishing between the ancient religion and the radical politicised form that seeks to purify Islam of the pollutions of modernity.

Spirit of Life UF had a follow-up service on religion and reason, led by one of their members after the earlier address by the president of the Rationalist Society of NSW. This, in turn, stimulated considerable questions and discussion. Their Christmas service and party was held on 13 December and they resumed meetings on 24 January.

They started the new year with some interesting talks and there has been discussion of the asylum seeker question. Some members attended a rally at Sydney Town Hall to oppose the government's intention to send children to Nauru. Several of their founding members are in nursing homes and are kept in touch with by means of the *Esprit* newsletter, visits from their Associate Minister, Rev. Geoff Usher, and phone calls.

Sydney UC had its Christmas service and party on 20 December, with the usual operatic choir who also sang carols after the lunch. The showing of remastered silent movies, with piano accompaniment from the original scores, has become a monthly event, featuring films from many countries that go back as far as 1898. The presenter always provides interesting commentary and light refreshments are provided afterward.

In February, there was a Music Service featuring the works of Beethoven. Most of the services in March will be PowerPoint presentations about Nepal, China and Vietnam. The young lady in the Philippines they are sponsoring is doing a final lengthy practicum to qualify as a primary teacher.

UUs of Christchurch continue to hold services on the second Sunday of each month and meet for a shared meal on the last Sunday. They were saddened by the passing of their long-time member, Brian Robinson, aged 78 years. Brian had lived in the UK and North America before coming to New Zealand, where he was involved with the Wellington UUs before becoming a member of their group.

Universalist Anniversaries, cont'd.

Unfortunately, by this time, the UCA's numbers had been dwindling since before the change of name. The Universalists and Unitarians had held friendly relations and common political causes from their early days, so an amalgamation was the obvious solution. It took years of negotiations but an arrangement was finally reached and the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations was formed in 1961.

In truth, the two churches had come to a point where their philosophies complemented each another. Unitarianism had come to mean one truth, rather than one god, and Universalism had come to mean that all the religions in the world have something we can learn from, rather than universal salvation.

[For a history of early Universalism in Britain and Europe, please see the Spring 2011 issue (pp. 14/15). It includes the remarkable story of George de Benneville, who narrowly escaped both beheading for heresy in France and a premature burial in Germany.]

COMMON DREAMS 4

The fourth Common Dreams Conference will be held in Brisbane on 16–19 September 2016 at Somerville House. The theme of the conference will be 'Progressive Spirituality: New Directions' and the program will cover a broad spectrum of topics exploring what it means to be 'spiritual' in contemporary times.

The keynote speakers will be: Dr. Diana Butler Bass, author of nine books on American religion; Prof. Pamela Eisenbaum from the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado; and the well-known Australian theologian, Dr. Val Webb. Rev. Dr. David Felten, co-founder of 'Living the Questions' and keynote speaker at the third Conference in 2013, will also feature along with a strong team of Australian and New Zealand presenters who will give addresses, lectures and workshops.

During part of the conference, there will be a parallel program designed, presented and led by 'young' people exclusively for their contemporaries. Registrations will open in April 2016, so check the Common Dreams website (<http://www.commondreams.org>) no later than that.

In related news, Rev. Dr. Robin Meyers will undertake a speaking tour in May, which will be his first visit to Australia. Called 'Common Dreams on the Road', his tour will take in Melbourne, Perth, Sydney and south-eastern Queensland. The best-selling author of seven books, he has been a senior minister of the United Church of Christ for 30 years and is also Distinguished Professor of Social Justice in the Philosophy Department of Oklahoma City University, where he has taught for 25 years.

[Common Dreams is an alliance of progressive Christian organisations in Australia-New Zealand, founded in 2006 at the instigation of Rex Hunt and Jonathan Rae, both of the Centre for Progressive Religious Thought. The first Conference was held in Sydney in 2007, followed by Melbourne (2010) and Canberra (2013).]

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Well, here we are, back for another year and I just hope you like this issue. I have made a few adjustments to the previous format, most notably leaving any hyperlinks to Internet sites in place so they can be accessed directly from the electronic version. This is distributed by many groups that don't have printing facilities but, also, anyone reading a hard copy can go to the ANZUUA website (www.anzuua.org) to use those links when this issue is posted there.

The 'ANZUUA News' column has a couple of requests for interested people to contact the Executive. However, I know of no way to do this, so just send your emails to me at: michael.mcphee@optusnet.com.au and I will forward them to the appropriate person. That address is also where you should send articles, comments, suggestions or anything else you think may be of interest to our community. (And please don't be shy, as I'm confident that there is a lot more talent out there than we know about.)

As always, my thanks to the contributors to this issue, which I think has had particularly good input. But now my cupboard is almost bare again, so please do what you can to refill it – June is not that far way and I will need to start work on the next issue at the end of April.