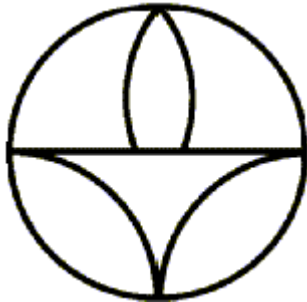




# Quest

NEWSLETTER OF THE

AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND  
UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION - ANZUA



**Autumn 2002**

President - Rev. Dr. Mark Allstrom  
Vice President - Mark McGregor  
Secretary - Darryl McCann  
Treasurer (elect) - Ivy Fisher  
Administrative Assistant - Barbara Willow  
Editor – Jock Mackenzie

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## ☞ The Lord's Prayer ☞

(adapted by Lesley McKeown)

Spirit of Life, source of our being,  
 Where goodness and creative loving kindness dwell:  
 Help us to create a better world  
 Where all creatures have food, shelter and warmth.  
 Remembering our frailties as humans,  
 Forgiving others as we forgive ourselves,  
 Let our conscience and reason  
 Lead us into paths of goodness and right conduct,  
 Where our fellowship of love and service to humanity,  
 Will lighten the darkness of the world,  
 Forever and ever.  
 Amen

### EDITORIAL

Greetings Everyone.

Well, this is our first edition in colour! I hope you all get to see it in its splendour. I believe Jock is putting it on the Internet. My understanding is that the ‘contact’ people will download and photocopy so each member will have their newsletter to hold, take home, relax, and read. If their copy is in shades of grey – then click on to the Internet and see Quest in Colour!

I think our new column about ‘how I became to be a Unitarian’ will be an enjoyable read for most of us. You know I think we may be getting the hang of things – so please start sending quotes, graphics, stories, things of interest to Jock for the next issue. Yes, Jock has agreed to collate the newsletter for the next issue. He’s certainly made it look more attractive.

It is fairly cold here in Adelaide. Winter has come at last! Time to hibernate and look within for the gold - explore our inner landscapes.

“While we stumble in darkness the heart makes our meaning and offers it into our life and creation  
 That we may give meaning to life and creation  
 For we only give meaning we do not find meaning  
 The thing we can’t find is the thing we shall give”

With those few words by Leunig taken from his book *The Prayer Tree* I shall take my leave. Have a wonderful winter. Bye for now.

Barbara



Hi All,

Hope you enjoy. We'd love to get your feedback especially constructive suggestions about what you'd like to see here. We are also after contributions of art, articles, addresses and letters to Quest.

We will also publish this newsletter on the ANZUA website at [www.anzua.org/quest](http://www.anzua.org/quest). Note if you are reading this newsletter on your PC or via the website then note that the links in the text are live so please click on the links in the text to see more.

The deadline for the next issue is Friday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2002 and then newsletter will come out a week after that. I'll look forward to it as indeed I hope you all do.

Also don't forget our new newsgroup on SmartGroups at <http://www.smartgroups.com/groups/anzua>

Jock

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

### ONE YEAR ON

It has now been over a year since our last conference in Melbourne and a little less than a year before our next one in Adelaide. At our last meeting we set an **agenda** for the next two years, which was based on the ideas set forth in my keynote address which can be found at [www.anzua.org/anzua/keynote.cfm](http://www.anzua.org/anzua/keynote.cfm)

Each point of this agenda is addressed below.

#### 1. *Ensure the periodical is printed regularly*

The periodical is ANZUA's newsletter **Quest**, which you are reading at this moment. This is the third since the 2001 conference and we plan on producing two more before our next conference. It is produced and sent out electronically so the contact people in each congregation can print up copies for members of the congregation. It is also available on our website. [www.anzua.org/quest](http://www.anzua.org/quest)

This is a much cheaper method than any used before and allows much longer contributions than could be published in a posted format.

#### 2. *Disseminate the ANZUA Mission Statement*

The ANZUA **mission statement** was adopted at the last conference with minor changes and was distributed to existing congregations. It is a valuable tool for your congregation to set goals and establish norms and I urge you to explore others ways it can be used.

#### 3. *Urge congregations to identify the purposes and principles that are important to them and disseminate this information.*

Apart from the UCV (see membership report), the attempt to identify those **principles and purposes** important to the various congregations hasn't yet come to anything but we are looking for those. Perhaps your congregation could begin such a process now in order to complete it by our next conference. (Those kinds of workshops are excellent for establishing goals and means so please contact me if you'd like some ideas as to how to set it up.)

#### 4. *Ensure the website is properly set up and maintained.*

A working group has been looking into improvements and maintenance of the **website**. [www.anzua.org](http://www.anzua.org) Special thanks to Jock Mackenzie and others for getting this off the ground. We are looking for contributors for the website, if anyone out there with writing, editorial, HTML or graphic and design skills, who wants to help out then please contact **Jock Mackenzie** [jockmackenzie@yahoo.com.au](mailto:jockmackenzie@yahoo.com.au) or 03 9510 5123.

Any group who needs advise or help getting their own website off the group are welcome to contact Jock.

#### 5. *Administer and oversee the use of funds for the Adelaide church's radio outreach program.*

We haven't asked for any funds from ANZUA to help pay for the Adelaide church's **radio show** because we haven't reached the point where we start using them to broadcast from regional centres. That should be happening shortly. So far the church has produced over 50 shows.

#### 6. *Hire an Administrative Aide*

We hired Barbara Willow as our **administrative aide** and she has done an excellent job keeping up with each congregation, arranging for the Quest newsletter, filing, compiling a file of the constitutions of our various congregations to serve as guides for new one congregations, keeping the Exec informed of relevant information, etc. She has been a tremendous help and I am very grateful to her.

Should you have any queries regarding ANZUA and its activities please feel free to contact her on [bwillow@esc.net.au](mailto:bwillow@esc.net.au) or on 08 8346 2581 Wednesday mornings.



7. *Urge groups to develop and disseminate **position papers***

Groups have been urged to come up with position papers on various issues but none have been forthcoming. Again I would urge groups interested in exploring various issues, particularly regarding **how our free religious faith informs their social justice views**, to produce these. It could be an invaluable resource to the other congregations.

8. *Promote the Adopt-a-Toddler: Support a Family sponsorship program.*

The **Adopt-a-Toddler** program with the Philippine church on Negros Oriental is functioning well. Those individuals and groups who have been participating in the program are sent regular letters from their children. People are reminded that it is a five-year commitment of US\$150 and though that can be a drain on financial resources, it is serving the needs of Unitarian Universalist children by providing them with good education.

9. *Plan biennial budgets and dues scheme.*

A budget would be nice but nothing has been done so far in part because of Eric Heller-Wagner's recent resignation as ANZUA Treasurer (nevertheless a hearty thanks to Eric for all his work.) However the Exec will be working with our **incoming Treasurer, Ivy Fisher**, as soon as possible to begin that process.

10. *Administer the collection of dues from member groups.*

Our incoming Treasurer, Ivy Fisher, will be sending out the **dues statements** very soon. We apologise for the delay.

11. *Ensure the professional religious leaders contact Unitarian groups in the US, Canada and England to ensure ministerial candidates are properly informed of the exigencies and contingencies involved **in ministry in the Australian and New Zealand churches and fellowships.***

I have conferred with the offices at Essex Street in London, a representative of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, and the Ministerial Department of the UUA in Boston concerning the particular needs of Antipodean ministries and I believe they see how essential it is for short-term and permanent ministry candidates to understand that Unitarianism is different than what professional ministers might expect in other countries. I have found, however, that continual reminders are helpful. I have also written and talked with several potential candidates and the congregations of Sydney, Brisbane/Toowoomba and the New Zealand South Island about the possibilities of short-term ministries.

12. *Investigate dates other than Easter for the 2003 conference.*

I have found it difficult to identify other times for the biennial conference other than Easter and through conferring with others have come to believe it is a low priority, yet I am open to ideas if any are forthcoming.

13. *Investigate a mechanism whereby **congregational conflicts** can be resolved*

At the moment there is still no adequate mechanism for **conflict resolution**. A number of churches have faced conflicts of various degrees in the past year and I personally helped directly with one and indirectly with another.

While able to aid the first I was unable to help the second because I was not asked (which is an essential first step), and because the particular dynamics were such, that a conflict resolution "referee" would have been ineffective and the effort to bring someone - anyone - in would have been a waste of time and money.

Above all, conflict resolution requires a real commitment on both sides of the issue to try to work things out. If that commitment is not present, the referee ends up being the target of everyone else's frustration and nothing is solved. Beyond that, what is needed in ANZUA at this point is a group of trained referees who are willing and able to travel to where conflicts do exist. Unfortunately there have been no volunteers coming forth. If, however, you or someone you know is able to serve in this capacity then please contact Barbara Willow or myself.

14. *Promote member group participation in a **banner-making process***

My wife and I took the Adelaide church banner to Cleveland for the UUA General Assembly in 2001 and to the British General Assembly's conference in Sheffield in 2002. In Cleveland the stage manager was so excited to have something from so far afield among all the others that he had it placed centre-stage, in full view right behind the speaker's podium. The British were pleased about it too and our picture with the banner was published in the Inquirer newsletter. But we would have preferred taking an **ANZUA banner** as well. It is merely symbolic, but symbols are important too. If anyone has design-ideas or a willingness to create such a banner, please contact me.

15. *Seek funding from international Unitarian funding sources.*

For the last couple of months I've been working trying to secure some grants from the **Unitarian Universalist**



**Funding Panel** in support of our Outreach Programs. On 26 May we heard that the grant of **US\$7500** had been awarded to us so we can broadcast selected programs from the Adelaide church's "Expanding Horizons" radio show in regional centres in Australia and New Zealand in order to start new fellowships or bolster existing ones. (More on this below.)

The agenda has been an excellent guide for the work the Exec has accomplished in this year and I urge ANZUA to adopt an agenda as part of the business of every meeting. Australia.



Pumpkins in the Corn by Jo Guthrie

## ANZUA TREASURER

On 27 May, the Exec voted to have **Ivy Fisher** of the Adelaide church to fill the role of Treasurer to replace Eric Heller Wagner. As per the rules of ANZUA, the Exec must so inform the member congregations and unless there is an objection within 30 days, Ivy will hold that position at least until the 2003 meeting.

Objections can be filed with Mark McGregor (as Vice-president), Daryl McCann (as Secretary) or myself (as President). Ivy can be reached through the Adelaide church, 99 Osmond Terrace, Norwood, SA 5067

## 2003 EASTER CONFERENCE

Come to Adelaide for Easter! The theme for our 2003 Easter Conference is "**The Gifts We Share**" and the conference has been set for Easter weekend (**18-20 April 2003**) in Adelaide. We are arranging for home hospitality so get your requests in early. We are developing an excellent program involving Dick Weston-Jones (interim in Auckland) to lead a service on Friday evening and Peter Ferguson (minister in Perth) to preach on Easter morning. We are hoping an overseas guest will provide the keynote address. We would like input - especially ideas for workshops - so if you have any please contact Mark Allstrom or Barbara Willow.

The proposed schedule is as follows:

### Friday

5:00 to 6:30 Registration and Welcome  
6:30 to 7:30 Supper  
7:30 to 8:30: Worship with Rev. Dick Weston-Jones

### Saturday

9.30 to 11:00 Workshops  
11:00 to 11.30 Morning Tea  
11.30 to 1:00 Keynote Address  
1:00 to 2:00 Lunch  
2:00 to 4.30 Business Meeting  
4.30 to 7:00 Free Time  
7:00 late Dinner and Entertainment

### Sunday

10:30 to 12:00 Easter Worship with Rev. Peter Ferguson  
12:00 to 12.30 Free Time  
12.30 to 1.30 Lunch  
1.45 to 5:00 Business Meeting  
5:00 Closing

There may be subsidies available from ANZUA for some distant travellers but we have yet to reckon the finances.

## NEW CONGREGATIONS

The **Unitarian Fellowship in Toowoomba (UFIT)** started up early last year and continues to meet regularly. They plan their fortnightly services so that they alternate with the Brisbane Fellowship's fortnightly meetings.

In 1865, a Unitarian church was created from an old school house in the bush of **Shady Grove** in the Adelaide Hills. It continued offering weekly services into the 20th century but soon after became a part of the Adelaide church which then used the chapel three Sunday mornings a year and for Christmas Eve



services. It remains as a chapel, hostel and cemetery set amid the ecologically pristine bush. We started offering alternative services there shortly after I arrived in Adelaide in 1997 but we soon found it was too much of a drain on resources to continue so we began offering once-a-month evening Vespers. Then in mid-2000 a group of religious liberals in nearby Strathalbyn, South Australia became aware of Unitarianism through Eric Heller Wagner's interview on ABC Radio. They contacted me shortly after and I attended a few of the discussions and they started coming to our Vespers. Last Spring they became a church in their own right (though still technically a part of the Norwood congregation) and they handle the Vespers by themselves. It is a joy to see Shady Grove at last beginning to realise its potential.

The **Unitarian Community of Victoria UCV**, a second Melbourne congregation, opened its doors in February and is currently writing its constitution. They have recently drawn up a Statement of Purposes and Principles, which are included in this editions member report.



## REMOTE UNITARIANS

Over the last few years I have been sending out my sermons to a group I call "Remote Unitarians" - usually people too remote from an existing Unitarian church or fellowship to attend regularly, but sometimes people at existing churches and fellowships who occasionally use them for services. In October my computer crashed but I was able to keep a list of most of the recipients. Then in February another problem developed which I think I was able to solve by the end of March - right before I went off to attend the conference in Sheffield. But there may be some who have "slipped through the cracks." If you or

someone you know would like to receive these sermons, please let me know.

After the problem in February occurred, Jock Mackenzie offered to set up the sermons on a website. Some people are happier with having them sent from me and some are happier receiving them from Jock's website. Please let us know which you prefer.

To receive the sermons from the web go to [www.smartgroups.com/groups/allstrom\\_sermons](http://www.smartgroups.com/groups/allstrom_sermons).

## UU FUNDING PANEL GRANTS

In my Keynote Address last year, I wrote, "I want to be proud of ANZUA. I want you to be proud of ANZUA. I want the American and British Unitarians to view us with respect. I want them to say 'I wish my fellowship could do what they do in Christchurch' or 'Just look at what Perth accomplished in just one year!' I want them to say 'I can't believe all the wonderful things coming out of Brisbane.' But it is up to us to make that happen. Establish a goal, set the vision, and take the responsibility. Work for it and knock their socks off."

On 26 May we received notice that a US\$7500 grant was to be awarded to us to begin sending the Adelaide church's radio program to regional centres for broadcast. The Program Director wrote, "The Panel loved the project!" With the airing of each program an announcement would be made that if listeners would like to contact a Unitarian representative, they can call a given phone number or contact me at my email address. If you think this program would benefit your church or fellowship's outreach program, please let me know. We will be identifying target areas within the next two months. Part of this grant is to help develop a non-proselytising values definition and spiritual guidance for prison inmates. It is hoped this program can be used in other states as well.

## UNITARIANS FOR REFUGEES

We also received a grant for our Unitarians for Refugees program, a program to assist Middle Eastern refugees in their assimilation to Australian life, society and culture. The main priority is to teach English but then also to assist in finding employment and acquire permanent visas so they can eventually bring their wives and children to join them. The group thanks the Christchurch Unitarian Universalist Fellowship for their inspiration. Last year they helped an Afghani family relocate in Christchurch.



The grant makes it possible to expand the existing program - possibly, with the help of other Unitarian churches, to other capital cities. If interested, contact Louise Allstrom through the Adelaide church. Louise writes,

“We are not here to judge the policy of the Government or the reasons why the refugees left their homeland. The fact they subjected themselves to such an expensive and dangerous passage to Australia has taken a large toll. Now, if they are to be a part of our society, they will need the assistance of common folk like us. Some may agree and some may disagree with the Government’s treatment of the refugees, but we are just trying to help people, who are now in our society, to fit in with our way of life. As one of our Afghani friends, Hamkar, told me, ‘Why would I want to return to my country now because even though it has changed, it is still the same. And to be able to walk out on the street at night and feel safe at last is something we all want for our own families.’”

The church also offers monthly potluck dinners where students and tutors share a meal and conversation because they have found their friends are also looking for a community and the hand of friendship.

One of the refugees, Mr. Muhammed Hamkar spoke at the church on 27 January about his own views and experiences coming to our country and since his arrival. It was enlightening to hear him talk about his ordeal because, as someone said after that service, “I cannot believe I let the media make up my mind!”

In the email informing us of the awards, the Program Director of the Funding Panel wrote, “The Panel loved both projects!”

We’ve just been informed that The International Association for Religious Freedom General Meeting will be held in Budapest, Hungary at 2.30PM, Friday, 2 August. If anyone from a member ANZUA congregation wants to represent us, please let us know.

*Rev Mark Allstrom, President of ANZUA*  
[unitariansa@picknowl.com.au](mailto:unitariansa@picknowl.com.au)

**MY PATH TO UNITARIANISM BY  
 YVONNE CHISHOLM**  
 to the Unitarians of Wellington, 18 July 1999

Until recently I thought that my introduction to Unitarianism was recent one – mainly through the ads for talks that were in the paper about three or four years ago. But I discovered recently that as a university student I thought of going to the Unitarian Church in Auckland.

By then, the late 1960’s, I was deeply involved in the Presbyterian Church. I had had a typical Southern New Zealand Presbyterian upbringing in Timaru and Gore. I went to Sunday School, Girls Brigade, Bible Class. I was confirmed during my sixth form year in Kaikohe. During my student days I taught Sunday School and Bible in Schools.

But maybe less typically I did ask questions. I was puzzled when my wanting to know was considered a challenge to tradition. I believed – and still do – that any worthwhile tradition can stand up to questioning. I cheered Lloyd Geering on before, during and after his heresy trial. I was excited by his ideas, which I only partly understood. I was very, very angry when I discovered that what he was saying had been known to Ministers for years and years. I felt betrayed – did the church consider the people’s faith too fragile to be exposed to new ideas? Or did they think we were too thick to understand? Both possibilities appalled me.

After university I went to Papua New Guinea and taught for two years at a United Church High School. I returned to New Zealand at the end of 1972 planning to do a Bachelor of Divinity at Otago University.

However, within a year I was no longer going to church because I felt both constrained and limited. I felt constrained from asking questions and from far-reaching exploration of issues of faith. I felt limited because there was little scope other than Sunday School teaching - which I’d moved beyond - for a young woman in a conservative predominantly middle-aged congregation in Auckland.

I became involved in the Mt Albert Labour Party. We thought and debated far into the night. We ran local body and general election campaigns. Labour Electorate Committee meetings were on Sunday mornings as we had a Cabinet Minister as our MP. I went to these meetings instead of church.

One Sunday morning in late 1992 I turned up at St Michel’s Anglican Church, Newlands. I didn’t know why I was there. That Sunday morning, not long after a traumatic family reunion, I had woken up with the thought “you should go to church.” Even though, I hadn’t been to church except for beginning and end of



term services at Roman Catholic schools I visited as a vocational guidance counsellor, I got up and went.

Still not knowing why, I kept on turning up every two or three weeks - any more might have meant being asked to get more involved and I wasn't ready for that. I only started going more often when the vicar made it clear I could move at my own rate. I enjoyed his sermons - well thought out, challenging to both the mind and the emotions. He encouraged us to think. He expected us to think. The first book he lent me was John Spong's "Rescuing The Bible From Fundamentalism."

I began to know why I was there. I started to feel God's presence. It was, and is, something I still can't explain. I wish I could - I am uncomfortable with unexplained mysteries; but I am learning to accept them.

However, soon I was having difficulty with aspects of traditional Christian beliefs - including some that were new to me.

I squirmed at the view that Jesus died for us or instead of us and that God had demanded this. Surely not?

Was I misunderstanding what I heard? No, that's what the communion service said. That what the transcripts of sermons said. I talked with people who told me that Jesus dying for them was what gave them life. The tone of their voice confirmed this. I was confused. What lit their faces up and gave them zest and enthusiasm appalled me.

Even more so, it undermined - and still does - my view of God as the positive - the life force - of the universe. For me, it turns God into a manipulative monster. It turns upside down my view of Jesus as someone to be respected and admired because of his deep relationship to God, his living life to the full, his revolutionary ideology and above all for making and then carrying through with dignity and without self-pity his decision to die rather than compromise his beliefs. It turns him into someone to be pitied - a powerless victim. I also disliked - and still do - the suggestion that I have his blood on my hands.

Then one Trinity Sunday we had the traditional concept of the Trinity explained to us. As a result it became clear, that while the doctrine could be interpreted in more than one way, it is a basic Christian belief. I found it a very strange and very disturbing idea. I could not accept it then; I cannot accept it now. To me God is God. Jesus is Jesus.

Continuing going to church became a challenge. I wanted to be there because that was where I experienced God. I also wanted to so in the company of others who had the same experience. But at times it was the last place I

wanted to be. I would be in tears. Also, I didn't want to hear statements that:

- put humans down ("We are not worthy even to eat the crumbs from under you table")
- exhort us to live life in a dependent child-like way (so we and all your children will be free) or encourage us to be victims
- promote hierarchical views especially those that imply limited direct access to God (which we offer through Jesus Christ our Great High Priest).

At first I kept quiet about my ideas and reactions. I was careful to whom I spoke - mainly as a result of some of those I spoke to first being surprised if not appalled at what I was saying. It was as if I was talking a foreign language or coming from another planet. One person told me I was a Unitarian and so shouldn't take communion. I was appalled at this statement, not so much its content as the assumption that the decision wasn't mine to make.

Some I spoke to listened, a few understood, some even felt the same way. Some of those who listened, and still listen, are people with a traditional Christian faith who are secure enough in it to listen to what I am sure they consider heresy. I am grateful to them for listening to me, for trying to understand, for sharing their faith and for accepting me where I am.

I continue to struggle within the Christian Church. They are times of laughter and joy. There are times of despair and tears. There are times when I know I belong. There are times when I feel I don't, that I shouldn't even be there. The times when I know I belong are those when I hear my God spoken about. The times when I don't are when I hear of a God who demands total obedience and sacrifice.

Reading and hearing the views of people like Lloyd Geering, Marcus Borg, John Spong and Robert Funk sustain me during my journey. More important than helping confirm many of my views and helping me to understand why I reject some of theirs, they have provided the example of a process I need to follow to develop my own spirituality - to gather evidence, to think clearly, to be true to myself and to be open to all possibilities. (This was why I used the reading I did from Robert Funk's "Honest To Jesus" at the beginning of this service.) They excite me - what might they think next?. What might I think next? It is through their words, which follow from their process, that I feel God.

John Spong in particular has enabled my heart to soar. When he was in New Zealand two years ago I was experiencing work-related burnout. I ended up in tears



each time I heard him speak. I came to realize that what I reacted to was his statement that the message of the Gospel is that God wanted us to live fully, to love wastefully, and be all that we can. I compared my life to that and felt the difference. While my breakdown was still to come the recovery began then.

Reading books for an assignment on Unitarianism as part of a Massey Religious Studies paper I did a couple of years ago also excited me as I traced its evolution within and from Christianity and its development beyond this. It also made me realize my views had a reputable history. I no longer feel vulnerable when people tell me my views are weird and that no-one else thinks as I do. Unitarianism's challenge to incorporate people of all types of beliefs is exciting. The freedom of thought exhilarating and liberating.

At the moment I am on a journey to discover why some of the traditional Christian beliefs upset me as much as they do. I would like to be able to disagree with them as I can other points of view or beliefs without becoming upset. Maybe more about this journey on another occasion.

*Yvonne Chisholm*  
[yvonne.chisholm@paradise.net.nz](mailto:yvonne.chisholm@paradise.net.nz)

## This is what you shall do:

Love the earth and the sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone who asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labour to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence towards the people, take your hat off to nothing known or unknown nor to any man or any number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint of your body

Walt Whitman

## COLUMN: HOW I BECAME A UNITARIAN

Every issue we ask people to write and share with us how they came to call themselves Unitarians. If you would like to share then please write to at [bwillow@esc.net.au](mailto:bwillow@esc.net.au)

Dear Quest,  
 It is difficult to pinpoint one reason why I have chosen to belong to the Unitarian Church. I first heard of

Unitarianism via the Sydney Church's Anniversary interview on ABC Radio National. Snippets of a 'creedless Church' and other like comments raised my inquisitive response..

I attended local worship services and found them to be most appealing. They seemed very inclusive of a variety of points of view, they were inclusive of all ages, there was a definite feeling of respect for creativity among members, while the sermons were wide-ranging, challenging, thought-provoking and inspirational.

Over the years I have been somewhat of a professional "non joiner"...yet here I am almost two years later, not only an official member, but an involved participant in the Church's services and many related activities.

With this passage of time. may I respond to the potential assumption that being a Unitarian is an "easy ride" because you can just "believe what you like". On the contrary, I have found the quest for truth concerning life's mysteries to be extremely challenging, at times frustrating. To find your own true meanings puts much pressure on self-assessment and who ever said that would be easy!

I have great respect for the effort and wisdom of our Minister, Rev Mark Allstrom; I am in awe at the energy and effort of the various committee workers; and I owe much gratitude for the welcoming warmth of fellowship so generously offered by our Unitarian community.

*Don Bilney Norwood Church, Adelaide*



Dear Quest,

The reason I came to the Unitarian Church was that it was located just a short distance from my new home.

I immediately liked:

1. The non dogmatic ethos – I was not required to accept an established creed.
2. The energy demonstrated by the congregation
3. The welcome I received
4. The music – hymns which made sense, and the quality of piano playing
5. The coffee

I stay because I feel valued, because my involvement is offering opportunities to develop new skills and participate in new activities, but most of all because the message I hear is consistently affirming, constructive, and challenging.





*Peter Daughtry Norwood Church, Adelaide*



Dear Quest,

About a year ago I did a quiz at BeliefNet.com. This quiz may at first seem trite and superficial but I found it incredibly illuminating, very accurately reflecting the sliding scale of personal appeal that each major tradition held for me, but curiously at the top of the list was Unitarism Unitarianism (second only to Liberal Quakers). While I knew of and greatly respected the Quakers, I could not accept the idea of Jesus as God, my vaguely formed ideas of God have always been anti-trinitarian. And as for the Unitarian Universalists, who the hell are they, what an ugly name, I'd never heard of them.

But even a glance at a few web sites, greatly excited me. The long and proud historical tradition, the incredibly impressive list of notable Unitarians, the idea of personal theology, the acknowledgement of truths in virtually every strand of human spirituality and above all a profoundly satisfying and liberating concept of the nature of truth. That Absolute Truth (as claimed by most world outlooks including many secular) is by very nature intolerant and opens the way to all the savagery and barbarity that religions, sacred and secular, have unleashed upon the world.

Whereas the truth as espoused by science and reason and Unitarism, a truth that evolves to reflect the ever-unfolding revelation of Creation, suddenly opens up before me the vast wealth of human spiritual experience, no longer hidden behind the terrifying claims of Absolute Truth. I am now free to explore and develop my own spiritually, free of the fear of being trapped, free to sift through and accept the teaching of The Prophets, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammad and the sacred texts on my own terms and come to my own experience of the nature of the Divine.

*Jock Mackenzie, Unitarian Community of Victoria (UCV), Melbourne.*



Dear Quest,

I have frequented many churches and not been a member of any until I came across Unitarianism. As a girl in Liverpool, England, I witnessed much violence when the bands, the followers, the pageantry of the various Orange Lodges met up with the processions, the madonnas and the passions of the Roman Catholics. Sand was thrown into children's eyes, bottles were smashed and menacingly directed at people's heads. Religion seemed a hostile thing to get into. I was not to know at that time

that there were different churches scattered all over England who called themselves Unitarian.

Many years later I found myself 'spiritual shopping'. I tried many traditional and alternative belief systems. As a feminist I found many to exclude my principles and there always seemed to be a spiritual glass ceiling as to how far a woman was allowed to 'believe and grow'. The charismatic groups, although alluring at first (I can see their appeal) with their emotion and high powered energy were far too restrictive and I couldn't tolerate their attitudes toward women. I found on the whole that these various groups fell into two categories. One's that were cerebral and others that were emotional. I didn't want to make the choice between all heart, or all head, I wanted both!

Near the end of my search I saw an advertisement for a church in which the words "deeds not creeds" jumped out at me. The following Sunday found me entering the Norwood Unitarian meeting house where I was immediately struck by the warmth and the intelligence of the people there, and the creative inclusive atmosphere, it fairly buzzed. So, I had found head and heart together at last! But what about the woman question? Well, it was womb felt to discover that there was complete freedom for women and indeed the Unitarians were the first to ordain their women – and that the forewomen had made it their business to clear their hymnals of offensive religist words alluding to sin, blood, etc. What proactive women I thought – this is the place for me. I don't want to be tolerated, I want to be proactive in my spiritual journey and growth..

And so, I am still at the Unitarian place in Norwood, South Australia. It is an inclusive community with democratic principles. Everyone is valued. There's always something going on, lots to be involved with if you want, and the Sunday worship that brings us all together. My Sundays have never been the same since! And my woman spirit has found a harmony in Unitarianism with the feminist, pagan, Buddhist that I am.

*Barbara Willow, Norwood*



Dear Quest,

I became a Unitarian in June 1966 when I was aged in my mid-thirties. Seemingly a large number of people change their religious beliefs in later life, unless they happen to be born into a Unitarian family.

I was nominally brought-up as an adherent of the Church of England, but I never remember my parents



ever going to church. The teachings of orthodoxy just flowed over me and in fact I was never baptised at all.

In my reading I had come across unorthodox statements by others and became interested in them. I read quite an amount of the Bible and started to make my own interpretations that satisfied me.

About the middle of 1966 I saw a large advertisement in the "Herald" inserted by this church (the Rev. Bert Watson was minister at the time). I read it and agreed with the statements made. I wrote for more information and then attended a service. That led to further meetings. So here I am!

*Evan Davies, Sydney Unitarian Church*



Dear Quest,

I grew up in the Methodist Church, at Eastwood, in Sydney, where I became a qualified lay preacher. This church had a large congregation and a wide cross-section of Christian viewpoints. I found myself gradually moving towards the liberal wing.

In England in 1963 I found that I was further influenced in this direction. I heard two prominent liberal Methodist speakers, Dr. Leslie Weatherhead and Dr. Donald Soper. More radical, though, was the book "Honest to God" by Bishop John Robinson, just published. It opened up new ways of thinking of God.

Back in Australia, I realised that my long interest in Mahatma Gandhi was giving me a more flexible approach to Eastern Religions in general. I decided that I no longer wanted to be active in the Methodist Church. I knew of Unitarians from my reading of church history, and I discovered there was a Unitarian Church in Sydney.

I became a member in 1972, and have found it to be a place where I can be free and honest, and make friends of like mind.

*Peter Berry (Lay Minister) Sydney Unitarian Church*



Dear Quest,

I am one who did not choose Unitarianism in the first instance, but (in a sense) came to it from birth. I am the son of a father who had come to question his Anglican roots, and a mother who had come to question some of the Methodist teachings of here youth, and our family became involved in the local Unitarian fellowship when I was younger than I can remember. If it were possible to be

'born' a Unitarian, I guess that would describe my way of coming to the faith. However, I do not really feel that I was born a Unitarian, but rather that the process of discovering my religion began on that day, continued throughout my childhood, and will (I hope) continue for the rest of my life.

As a child it was difficult to manage the tension created by having beliefs that seemed at times to be at odds with many around me. For a child, I think it can be hard to find any middle ground between those who 'believe in God' and those who 'do not believe in God'. I felt very uncomfortable on any occasion where I was in the presence of any sort of religious service, and when my parents suggested one day that we might attend a local church service in the interests of being open-minded, I resisted strongly, unable to understand why they would want to be part of anything that promoted beliefs that I knew we did not share.

My ideas have evolved since that time, and I am now more inspired by ways in which we as Unitarians can move closer to those of other religious persuasions, including those who belong to various Christian denominations. This certainly does not mean compromising my own beliefs (I couldn't even if I wanted to), but rather looking beyond religious dogma to the deeper question of what we share as human beings. In short, I have found that 'dialogue' is much more meaningful as a way of understanding people than the religious labels we each choose for ourselves. Seven years ago I joined the Sydney Unitarian Church. Like some but unlike others in this world, I ultimately chose the religion of my earliest upbringing, but this time I made the choice for myself.

*Peter Roger (Church Organist) Sydney Unitarian Church*

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION BY GILLIAN COLLINS

FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN A SMALL  
CHURCH COMMUNITY

By Gillian Collins Phillip Island, Victoria, Unitarian Community of Victoria

The first step – be practical – you must have supplies if you are going to engage children and youth in activities that make them happy. You need paper, scissors, books, yarn, pens, paints and brushes, glue and sparkly stuff. These will need to be stored in large plastic tubs at a member's home, and available every week.



Next - don't give responsibility of religious education to one person. You will burn them out and exclude yourself from one of the great spiritual journeys – teaching a child.

Never forget the basics of your responsibility as an adult, even if you only have one child. Get all necessary name, address, birthday and health details, plus a signed parental permission for participation. Children may need a drink and snack during church school. It gives them an attention break, and allows for socializing.

Base your program on values and ethics, and consider developmental needs of each age group. Make Church school fun, and the children will want to come back. Religious education meets different needs than regular school, though maybe using some of the same methods. Remember always that children are challenged every day by ethical and moral dilemmas, and may be experiencing personal trauma, just as adults do. Church is not therapy, but it should manifest unconditional love.

If there are a small number with large age spans, consider the older children as role models and mentors for the younger ones. With multiple age groups, a project orientation may be better, and then each age group can have a task appropriate to their capacity. Keep the tasks simple, and able to be accomplished in one session if possible. Older children will enjoy the challenge of more complicated projects

Consider the UU curriculum “Coming of Age” for your teenage members, no matter how many you have. It may be more important if you have a small number or even one. Adults are guaranteed a challenging and engaging experience.

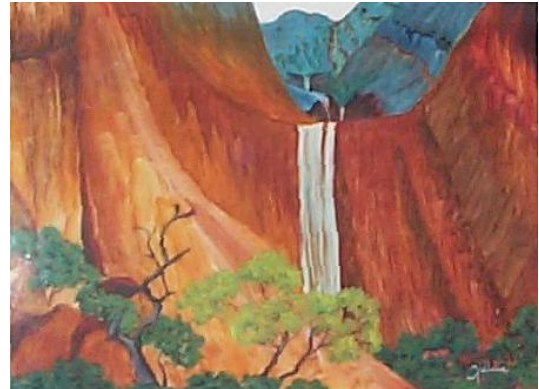
Decide on your program focus for the year in conjunction with the adult conveners so that you can provide possibilities for cross-fertilization and inter-generational activities. Look at material available on the Unitarian Universalist Association of North America web site – [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org)

There is great material available on the site, and by purchase of material through Beacon Press, the UUA publishing house. If you only purchase one curriculum a year, you will build a strong program base, and they are easy to use by even the least experienced adult.

Try to have inter-generational events with some regularity. Have the children participate in your service if possible, even if only to light the chalice and say a few hopeful words. Have them participate in “joys and concerns” if possible. The more children are involved in the service, the less special programming needs to be planned. Use the program focus of the adult service as a

springboard for the children's program. If you are investigating peace issues in the adult service, for instance, have the children discuss how they make friends, and what they do when conflict arises with peers.

Good conflict resolution skills are powerful tools, and help our children on their journey to understanding Unitarianism. Which is what church school is all about, whether you are a small or large congregation.



Uluru by Gillian Collins

## MEMBERSHIP REPORTS

### ADELAIDE

#### The Unitarian Church of South Australia

99 Osmond Terrace,  
Norwood, Adelaide 5067  
ADELAIDE, South Australia

Service: 10:30am Sundays

Contact: Rev. Mark Allstrom  
[unitariansa@picknowl.com.au](mailto:unitariansa@picknowl.com.au)

Phone: +61 8 8332 2803

Fax: +61 8 8332 5609

Hello Everyone. Isn't this a great layout? Thanks to Jock of the Victorian fellowship for putting it together. You've certainly added to the flavour Jock!

Now, what else have we been doing in Adelaide besides helping to gather interest and copy for the newsletter? We had a flower communion on Christmas Eve – we've been celebrating this now for three years. We deck out an old war cannon with flowers. By using an instrument of war as a backdrop to our petals of peace we hope in some way to counteract the old message and imbue it with new hope and meaning. Other faiths usually join us on the grass median strip and although not quite a traffic stopper, our readings, singing, and



music, would give out good vibrations to the passers-by.

In March we celebrated the Jewish Passover with a shared Seder Meal and Service in which both children and adults attended. There was an air of solemnity to begin with. Various foods were passed around and shared. The children were actively engaged in the readings and handing out the food. It was interesting and informative to celebrate another belief system's ritual. It made me think how we as Unitarians would celebrate one of our rituals (?) and with what foods?

Whilst Mark Allstrom was away in the month of May we continued our services with lay preachers. Unitarians seem to be a creative inventive lot – and we had no trouble finding speakers from our own congregation. One of the addresses is printed later on in the newsletter, by Daryl McCann. We also had different worship leaders during this time to take the service – giving more people an opportunity to take to the pulpit! Although a privileged experience, we were glad when Mark returned to resume his position in the pulpit.

We had our Pilgrimage, which is becoming an annual event. That means walking from Shady Grove down to the city to Norwood. It takes about 7 – 9 hours. Warm soup and foot massages welcomed the pilgrims on their return to Norwood.

Our monthly discussion group continues monthly – with provocative titles like “where was God born?” The Women's League continues their monthly shared lunch, activities and talk; they now include some of their menfolk. It always feels chatty and cosy whenever I've been around. The Women's Group has sustained its interest with various topics discussed monthly about women's journeying.

The Afghani Group has taken off. Apart from the obvious help and support our Afghani friends receive, it gives some us a chance to use our gifts and skills in very practical ways. There is a teaching programme, which involves home visits and outings for shopping, places of interest, and advocacy if necessary when dealing with social services etc. The potluck nights are well attended and give us all an opportunity to break down the boundaries and see each other as people learning to relate meaningfully with each other.

The energy is building for the Conference next year. We are going to be very busy. We've started having meetings about the programme, billeting, catering and the like. Busy times often bring people together. It is certainly energising. I hope Unitarians from all our fellowships can come. Maybe hire a bus? Prepare for a group booking, or share a vehicle and motor over. However you do it – don't miss it! It will be worth your time and effort. It's

really an amazing feeling being all together – a chance to experience our strength and to be inspired. And besides, Adelaide is a good place to have a holiday! See you then.

Barbara Willow

## AUCKLAND

### Auckland Unitarian Church

1A Ponsonby Rd,  
Auckland 1 New Zealand

Service: 10:00am Sundays

Contact: [Sue Radics radics@ihug.co.nz](mailto:Sue Radics@ihug.co.nz)

Phone: + 64 9 378 0112

Gill Violet is the new Chair of the Management Committee. She has been a member of the church since her arrival with her family from Cape Town, South Africa. That was 8 years ago. She was delighted that there was a Unitarian church in Auckland as she is a third generation Unitarian. This coming year is going to be a full and exciting one for Auckland for a number of reasons.

Firstly, Lini Nyenkamp is setting up systems and putting procedures in place for us to have a paid administrator. This will help us be more efficient. We are also looking forward to the return of Dick and Mary Weston-Jones in August because their month in March with us was so positive. They will also be assisting us in finding a settled minister.

We loved having Dick and Mary as they were enthusiastic, very energetic and practical. They created order out of the chaos of the church office and its systems. Dick's communication skills are admirable from the pulpit, via his letters and in face to face meetings. Because of the difficulties we have had over the last few years many of our members and adherents had stopped attending. Dick made a dedicated effort to contact everyone either in small group sessions or private visits to those who perhaps felt uncomfortable meeting in a group or had private issues to discuss. Through his efforts the numbers at services increased. Dick and Mary have left us feeling enthusiastic and motivated again, inspired really that we can survive.

Our RE programme for our youth group this year is focusing on visiting other religious groups while at the same time exploring how we are different and exploring what place we have to play in society. This is expected to be most stimulating.



## BLLENHEIM

### **Marlborough Unitarian Fellowship**

47 Hospital Rd,  
Blenheim, New Zealand

Meetings: 10.30am 1st & 3rd Sundays

Phone +64 (0)3-578-1071

Contact: Doug Stafford [dougjoy@xtra.co.nz](mailto:dougjoy@xtra.co.nz)

Venue: Plunket Rooms, Bythell St, Redwoodtown,  
Blenheim

The Marlborough Unitarians are a small group that meet fortnightly and we have all come from a variety of religious backgrounds.

Our recent meetings have covered a wide range of topics. Our speakers have come both from within the group and also visiting speakers, and all have provided stimulating and thought provoking sessions with opportunities for discussion and dialogue.

We had a session on Celebrations and all shared their thoughts regarding these special days and their significance to us. Do we have freedom of choice? This curly question was posed by one of our members and a lively discussion ensued as a result.

We had a session about China, given by a visiting speaker who had spent time there with his partner teaching English to Chinese students. This was a fascinating insight into a vast and often unknown country.

Religion, Gods and Afterlife was a topic explored by one of our members and this was followed by a session on 'East meets West'-a service conducted by a Buddhist friend of our group.

We have also been fortunate to have visiting speakers including Dick Westin-Jones and his wife, from America, to come and share with us.

As can be seen our programmes are varied and a small but committed group work hard to provide a stimulating programme to broaden all of our horizons.

Bev Frost

## BRISBANE

### **Brisbane Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**

PO Box 30 Wilston,  
Queensland 4051  
Australia

Venue: Building 38, University of Queensland, St.Lucia  
Meetings: 11:00am every 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month

Contact: Helen

Phone: +61 (0)7 3379 9337 or +61 (0)7 3356 8175

- At annual general meeting towards the end of last year we agreed to meet 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays of each month. This was done to align with Toowoomba who meet every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday.
- We are planning to hold a combined social gathering / service on Sunday June 30 for the Brisbane and Toowoomba members. This will be held at Wivenhoe Dam, which is a similar distance for each group to travel, and will combine a service led by Jed Perkins with a social gathering. We are keen to see how this will develop.
- We are still seeking to attract a visiting minister from abroad but it appears the international events of late last year have affected the plans of many. Whilst the prospect of a short visit (as opposed to an extended stay) is still possible for one of our contacts it is becoming more and more unlikely as time goes by. As always however Mark Allstrom has another lead ..... watch this space.
- The BUUF "Banner" has not progressed too far since the last newsletter however this is still in the pipeline.
- One of the highlights of our meetings has been the BUUF Choir led by Alisen McLeod. As part of her music studies at Queensland University Alisen is absent on a teaching practicum. She is greatly missed as is the fun of singing and the contribution live voices make to our Sunday services.
- The sad plight of asylum seekers incarcerated in Australian detention centres prompted the Fellowship to write to the main Brisbane paper on the issue. Whilst the letter was not amongst those published we have decided that letters to the editor could provide a forum for putting our views forward on a variety of issues and we intend to encourage this activity. (Note that letter writers must first discuss the issue they wish to address with the membership before writing on behalf of all members).
- Some very good news for this year is the recent contact by Kathryn Crissman and Stephen Myers who are living in Evans Head northern NSW. Kathryn originates from the US and has completed her formal ministry training though has not yet



been ordained. She is keen to achieve this so we are discussing the possibilities of how we may both benefit from their involvement within our group.

- Our travelling “potter” Ian Currie has returned from America following another lecture tour discussing specialist pottery glazes. We welcome his return and involvement within our group. Note Ian is also one of our keen choir members as well.
- We have just received word of the return of Dick & Mary Weston-Jones to the Southern Hemisphere and also the preliminary agenda for the wUUrld's Australia (the Australian version of UUWhale Coast tours) tour for 2003. Whilst this is all a long way in the future there is much planning to be arranged.

Leo De Groot

## CANBERRA

### **Unitarian Universalists in ACT**

8 Von Guerard Crescent  
North Lyneham ACT 2602 Australia  
Unitarian Universalists in ACT (Canberra)  
Occasional Services

Contact: [John Maindonald](mailto:John.Maindonald@ozemail.com.au) winjohn@ozemail.com.au  
Phone: +61 2 6230 4937

## CHRISTCHURCH

### **Unitarians of Christchurch**

30 Reserve Tce  
Lyttleton, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Venue: Arts Centre Function Rooms, Christchurch  
Meetings: 10:30am 1st, 2nd & 3rd Sundays

Contact: [Alastair Mackintosh](mailto:Alastair.Mackintosh@chch.planet.org.nz) alimac@chch.planet.org.nz  
Phone: +64 3 384 9099

At the end of last year the Unitarians of Christchurch started the process of working out a mission statement. Much worthwhile discussion did not produce a form of words but a great deal of mutual understanding, which perhaps would not have happened otherwise. A smaller group of us went for a "retreat" on Banks Peninsula in February to finalise the process and came up with the following:

With openness and in accordance with Unitarian Principles, we come together to share in our continuing commitment to a free and loving search

for spiritual meaning and to the expression of that meaning in our community and in our lives.

This was an adaptation of the mission statement from the Unitarian Church at Palo Alto, California, which had been favoured by our members in the previous meetings.

We are a small group with some 40 members on the mailing list and about 15 regularly attend the services, which are on the first three Sundays of each month. Most of our meetings are facilitated by our members, but we have been lucky this year to have had contributions from Doug and Joyce Stafford from the Blenheim group, who talked about Gandhi and his non-violent approach to dissent, Rev. Ian Crumpton, President of the Sea of Faith who spoke about the Evolution of Belief, and a visit from Dick and Mary Weston-Jones who could not fit in a Sunday but came to one of our regular Friday evening Pot-Luck dinners.

There has been much discussion recently about reinvigorating our group and perhaps increasing our numbers. One of the hopes we had was to have an interim minister. At the moment it looks as if this plan has fallen through. However the group remains in good heart and we extend a warm welcome to anyone passing through Christchurch to visit us in the function rooms of the Arts Centre above Annie's Restaurant and Bar

[Alastair Mackintosh](mailto:Alastair.Mackintosh@chch.planet.org.nz) alimac@chch.planet.org.nz

## MELBOURNE

### **Unitarian Community Victoria**

72 Powell Street, Regent VIC Australia

Meeting: 3:00pm 1st & 3rd Sundays

Venue: [See website](#)

Contact: [Jock Mackenzie](mailto:Jock.Mackenzie@ucv.org.au)

Phone: + 61 3 9380 1636

Unitarians in Melbourne, both old and new, came together to form a new fellowship in Melbourne called the Unitarian Community Victoria (UCV) on the 3rd February 2002. Since that first meeting, another service has been held, plus three other meetings to work on our incorporation and further discuss who and what we want to be.

A statement of purposes has been developed that will be included in our incorporation papers:



- We are a Unitarian Community dedicated to the ethical pursuit of a religion based on freedom, tolerance, reason and experience.
- We come together for regular religious services which include, readings, ritual, addresses sharing of joys and sorrows and milestone events in our lives such as births, deaths, marriages and remembrances, in an atmosphere of music and meditation.
- We provide learning, teaching and sharing environment for all ages, which ask the great questions about religions, philosophy and life.
- We encourage becoming part of the solutions of the moral, social and environmental challenges our society faces.
- We celebrate a calendar of formal and informal events that builds community and friendship across all ages.
- We are a community that respects, honours and engages in the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.
- We encourage a community for individual creative process including art, music, and writing.
- We seek a quality of group life where everyone is heard, respected, enabled to question and deserving of support and compassion through the diverse stages of their life's journey.
- We will be a self-governing, democratic community that seeks associations with other Unitarian communities across Australia and the world.

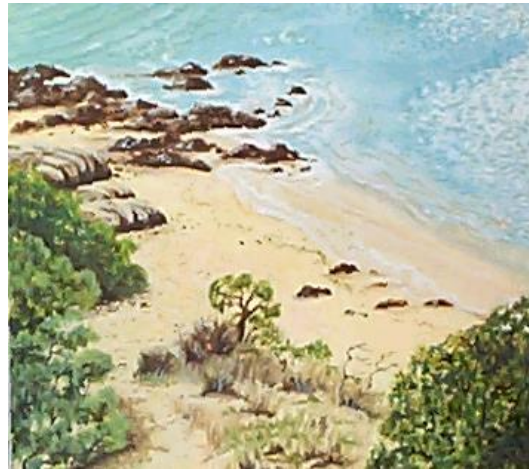
We have also developed a set of "beliefs" that will guide our activities together:

We believe

- in the value of organised liberal religion.
- that a religion can be lived based on freedom, tolerance, reason and experience.
- in the sacred, beyond arguments of how it be defined or engaged.
- in a dawning post-secular age when religion and spiritual issues will retake a central place in the life of people and society.
- in the need for constant effort to renew the Unitarian faith to meet and lead the spiritual needs of the day.
- in creating a vigorous, bold, Australian version of Unitarianism that will meet the needs of our society.

We hope all Unitarians from across the country will consider visiting with us when you are in Melbourne. Our services are currently on the first Sunday of the month. We do not yet have a stable location, so for more information call Jock on 03 9510 5123 or Neville on 03 8344 4711 or check out our website [www.anzua.org/ucv](http://www.anzua.org/ucv)

Gillian Collins UCV Secretary



To the Beach by Gillian Collins

## MELBOURNE

### **Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church**

110 Grey St, East Melbourne  
VIC 3002, Australia

Meditation: 10:00am Every second Sunday

Service: 11:00am Every Sunday

Contact: **Peter Abrehart**

Phone and fax: + 61 3 9417 4178

For those who read the 'Beacon' Newsletter insert, there are multitudes of activities going on within the Church. These range from Meditation/Relaxation classes, Concerts, Art & Craft Fetes to Unitarian Extension Movement (UEM) functions.

Up to the end of January 2003, I will be working full-time in the Church to at least begin the process of setting up a re-vitalised RE Program, including the Sunday School and Philosophy study group. Another part of my role will be to further develop our existing Interfaith links (and 'Intrafaith' links via ANZUA).

We will have at least one visiting Minister from the US for three weeks in February (to preach and 'input'). I am not sure whether he and his family are just visiting Melbourne or other parts of Australia and New Zealand. As the details unfold I will advise ANZUA via Mark Allstrom.

Regards to all, Peter Abrehart (Congregational Chairman)



## PERTH

### **The Perth Unitarian Congregation**

Contact: Graham Ferguson

Venue: 60 John Street, Cottesloe

Service: 10:30am 2nd & 4th Sundays

Phone 08 9286 4953(Home) 08 9442 1558 (Work)

The Perth Congregation meets on the second and fourth Sundays of each month. Our usual speaker, Peter Ferguson, is away for around two months, so we have been sharing the leadership responsibility around. Last Sunday we had an excellent talk by a psychotherapist who is deeply into Eastern style meditation. He shared his spiritual journey with us and generated a great deal of discussion.

We have around 30 members "on the books" with a regular attendance of about 20. We haven't yet found a suitable permanent venue and are currently meeting at a home with a huge lounge room in Cottesloe.

We were recently formally incorporated and will soon be applying for membership of ANZUA.

We should soon have our own website operating and are arranging to have a link placed on the main US UU website.

## SYDNEY

### **The Unitarian Church in NSW (Sydney Unitarian Church)**

15 Francis Street, East Sydney

PO Box 355, Darlinghurst NSW 1300, Australia

Service: 10:30am Sundays

Contact: [sydneyunitarians@mail2me.com.au](mailto:sydneyunitarians@mail2me.com.au)

Phone and Fax: +61 2 9360 2038

At our AGM in March, the congregation has chosen Peter Berry, a long time member to be our Lay Minister or Lay Leader. His appointment as interim part-time Lay Minister is for a minimum period of six months. Peter's background includes being a (formerly) Qualified Lay Preacher in the Methodist Church and a partially completed Master of Arts in Religious Studies. He was also Assistant Lay Preacher here back in 1975-76.

The building in which the Church is situated has finally completed its transformation from an office block to a residential complex. It has taken over two years. Thanks to the deed with the developer, the church property has

many new improvements: New kitchens and bathrooms in our flats and the Church, completely new painting and carpeting throughout, 2 new internal car spaces, new access from our flats to apartment complex lobby, new Church front entrance, and a beautiful new stained glass window. A new chalice symbol and lettering on the street facade are to be installed this month. We hope everyone will have an opportunity to visit Sydney and see our refurbishment.



The Sydney Church's new stained glass window

The Sydney Church is now annually donating \$400 (approx 10,000 rupees) to the Unitarian Union of N.E India (Khasi Hills) 'Village Education Fund'. This amount actually pays the salary of a teacher for a full year. Our money will be utilized for payment of the salary of a teacher at the new village School at Wahmawlieñ. We also send an annual Christmas donation to the Unitarian Church of Madras (Chennai).

*Russell Cowan [cowanruss@hotmail.com](mailto:cowanruss@hotmail.com)*

## TOOWOOMBA

### **Unitarian Fellowship in Toowoomba**

Contact: Jed Perkins

3 Albert Lane, Newtown,

Toowoomba

QLD 4350, Australia

Phone 61 +7-4632-0626

Venue: Highfield's, Toowoomba North

Meetings: 10:00 Sundays, once (or twice) a month





On 26 May the Unitarian Fellowship in Toowoomba (UFIT) had the best attendance ever. We are slowly gaining and the people are faithful in getting together. There is a happy spirit in the group. We have been meeting for just over a year, and meet every second Friday of the month for a fellowship tea and every fourth Sunday for a service.

Jed Perkins, a retired minister, lives in Toowoomba and has been granted permission from the Commonwealth to celebrate weddings according to Unitarians rites.

A number of people in Chinchilla, west of Toowoomba, are at the moment being pushed out of the Uniting Church congregation there. It has been rumbling along for years and now the Evangelical / fundamental group are in complete control. They've been sent UFIT's constitution and other material. We may have another fellowship forming.

A number of members are involved in the Sea of Faith, an organisation for the discussion of religious topics. Most of our members would have connection with Christian Churches before but felt that traditional Christian churches were not meeting their needs. We are seeking to be an open fellowship for all who wish to come.

## WELLINGTON

### Unitarians of Wellington

The Wellington Group's plans to meet on the first anniversary of going into recess did not eventuate. After finding it difficult to find a day and time which suited most of those who wanted to get together, we decided to defer the event until Dick Weston-Jones came to Wellington. As Dick's visit did not take place, our meeting did not take place nor did the guided tour of Wellington we had in mind for he and his wife.

In the next issue of "Quest" we will update you on the results of Ian Benges's research into the history of the Wellington Unitarian Church. He has located a number of documents, including the Trusteeship Deed. He is also assisting a researcher into the history of free-thinking groups in New Zealand.

When I planned a visit to Auckland recently I set aside the Sunday morning to meet Auckland Unitarians at their Sunday service - but I choose the weekend they were at their annual camp! However, while I was there I did get to the church and a friend took - during a break in the dense traffic along Ponsonby Road - a photo of me in front of the Meeting House. Then she came across the road and took one of me beside the signboard. Hopefully next time I get to Auckland I will get to a service.

Until the next issue of "Quest" best wishes from the members of the Wellington Group.

## ❧ Transcendence ❧

It is only in exceptional moods that we realise how wonderful are the commonest experiences of life. It seems to me sometimes that these experiences have an 'inner' side, as well as the outer side we normally perceive. At such moments one suddenly sees everything with new eyes; one feels on the brink of some great revelation. It is as if we caught a glimpse of some incredibly beautiful world that lies silently about us all the time.

I remember vividly my first experience of the kind when, as a boy, I came suddenly upon the quiet miracle of an ivy-clad wall glistening under a London street-lamp. I wanted to weep and I wanted to pray; to weep for the Paradise from which I had been exiled, and to pray that I might yet be made worthy of it. Such moments are rare, in my experience. But their influence is permanent. They import a tinge of unreality into our normal acceptances; we suspect them for the dull and purblind things that they are.

There are analogous moments when one suddenly sees the glory of people. On some unforgettable evening, one's friend is suddenly seen as the unique, irreplaceable, and utterly delightful being that he is. It is as if he had been freshly created. One is no longer concerned with his relations to oneself, with his pragmatic value. He exists wholly in his own right; his significance is eternal, and the essential mystery of his being is as fathomless as that of God Himself.

J W N Sullivan

## SMALL 'T' TRUTHS BY DARYL MCCANN

SECRETARY OF ANZUA

While I wasn't in China at the time of the Tienanmen Square Massacre, I was in China ten years earlier, in 1979, at the time of the Democracy Wall Campaign. Basically this involved ordinary citizens of China sticky-taping their own horror stories of what had happened to their families during the Cultural Revolution onto a wall in every city, town and village in the land. They generally addressed the local authorities of the Party with questions such as: 'With respect, what has happened to my husband (or wife) I haven't seen them since they were taken away 10 years ago. Are they safe? Are they still alive? Might they be returned to their family?' Eventually, sometime after I returned to Australia, the powers-that-be ordered these



requests for information torn down and outlawed any further defacing of public property.

My reason for being in China, which was before the tourist boom and modernization programmes of the 1980's, was that my oldest sister and her husband had jobs teaching English at Chejiang University in the city of Hangzhou. I stayed at her Soviet-built hotel for a month in the second half of 1979, and found out things about the nightmare that was the Cultural Revolution I had certainly not been taught by the Adelaide University Politics Department. More people died in the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations in America, I had been told in one lecture, than in all of China during the Cultural Revolution. Hard to reconcile this with the local execution site in the hills surrounding Hangzhou shown to me by a former Red Guard. He told me this with a strange mixture of regret, pride and bewilderment. And there were other people there with other dark tales to tell.

Back in Australia I attempted to tell my university friends and lecturers some of the details, but virtually everybody reacted as if what I was saying, or attempting to say, was an act of betrayal. Not of those individual Chinese who wanted to tell their stories, but as a betrayal of Mao's communist rule, that non-stop, smiling fairy-tale utopia, we had explained to us during our undergraduate years. Of course since then all the books have come out detailing the shocking truths of Mao's China, the autobiographies, the novels, even a tell-all biography by Mao's personal physician, but at the time, Spring 1979, my political friends didn't want to know. I had the sense of being in possession of some kind of truth, truth with a small "t" if you like, and finding it impossible to communicate that to people who were in possession of a larger ideological - or even religious - capital "T" Truth. To my political friends, what I had seen, heard, discovered, reasoned out with my own thinking, was essentially a lie. This was my first personal experience of small "t" political truth battling for survival against the Goliath of capital "T" Truth.

Another major experience of small "t" truth battling against the Goliath of capital "T" Truth occurred fifteen years later, after I found myself on long service leave from the South Australian state school system and invited to do a series of writing workshops at a private school. On the day I finished, I was asked if I'd like a permanent teaching job there. The school was run by a pretty conservative religious organization and at the subsequent interview I made clear that I was a liberal Anglican of the "Bishop Spong variety". This was, to my surprise and to my relief to be fair, cheerfully accepted as "near enough" to what they were after. My further surprise was that many of the more recently acquired members of the staff were similarly "small l" liberal in their religious orientation. Some weren't even religious at all, although

that was something only admitted privately. What had happened to this college? Basically, as I was to work out later, the Head was taking the school in a new direction, playing up IT and academic excellence and downplaying religious orthodoxy. This kind of in-house politics I didn't really grasp at the time, and didn't properly grasp until three years later when a new regime was installed and the school, literally overnight, lurched off in search of its conservative roots.

And so, suddenly, I found myself in the wrong place at the wrong time. Schools probably have the right to go in the directions they so choose, but it was just that I had signed on for a different direction. I had a mortgage and two small children, and suddenly I was a square peg in a round hole. Should I change, or at least give the appearance of doing so, to fit the new administration? The next eleven months turned out to be one of the most stressful, but also one of the most insightful, periods in my teaching career. Here are three quick snapshots.

(i) Reading virtually every dissenting religious book I could get my hands on and passing them on to fellow dissenters, in the end disguised in brown paper bags to their pigeon-holes when no-one was looking.

(ii) Another snapshot: An atheist who prided herself on her libertarianism suddenly making out she was religious and advising me to stop questioning the new regime and, 'after all, they were the ones paying my salary, weren't they?'

(iii) Someone approached me to join an underground group in the school called TRUTH. Being clandestine, I'm not sure the rest of the staff even found out we existed! Our fight back against the regime consisted of members sometimes writing T-R-U-T-H across the staffroom white board. This proved, sadly, a little too enigmatic to be of any great effect. In any case, within 18 months we had all chosen the path of exile, to more accommodating schools, a path rarely available to dissenters or refugees in the wider world.

Daryl McCann feeling uncomfortable in one job and having to find himself a place in another school is not a catastrophe in a world scale of things, is not a catastrophe in any scale of things, but it did give me another chance to experience what it feels like when an individual's conscience – mine in this case – an individual's perspective on life, an individual's sense of right and wrong, small 't' truth let's say, is simply swept away, steamrolled into oblivion by the vastly superior dynamics of a rigid Absolute Truth. And this, then, is crux of the problem. Absolute Truths, even when they are wielded, as they usually are, in the name



of humanity, for the salvation of humanity, or for one special section of humanity, roll right over the top of individuals and their individuals little consciences. One hundred million individuals, according to the latest accounts, died directly on account of the Absolute Truth of the most dynamic religion of the 20th Century, Marxist-Leninism. It was in the name of humanity – for the sake of humanity’s greater good – that such an unimaginably vast field of human individuals were cut down. To take the Tienanmen Massacre as only one example in the whole horror of communism in the 20th century, the People’s Government sent out the People’s Tanks to roll right over the top of the people.

For the cause of some Abstract Absolute Truth the most frightening things can be done in the name of Political Justice, in the name of History, in the name of God. Would the leadership of Al Quaida have slept any less soundly on the night of September 11th if the death of innocent people like you and me, a number of whom were actually Moslem, had been 30,000, 300,000, 3 million? When someone is in possession of an Absolute Truth, a capital “T” Truth, the bodies of the dead don’t seem to count for much. Vladimir Lenin, died, apparently, with no regrets for the millions of people who perished under his brief but bloody reign. Hitler had a regret. Not about the 6 million Jews and Gypsies and Homosexuals and Slavs. But that he had not been ruthless enough. Yes, that he had NOT been ruthless enough.

Absolute Truths, almost by definition, prevents the right of individual small “t” truths to exist. It’s a bit like the cod and the carp in our River Murray. And it is not just the Hitlers and the Bin Ladens who are swept along at times by Absolute Truths. It happens to me, and I’m sure it happens to all of us. Take the Israel-Palestinian Conflict as an example. How many people have I heard lately espouse moral outrage only when the victims are on “their side”. The Absolute Political Truth they hold, whether they actually know anything about the 1948 War, the 1967 War, the 1973 War, the finer details of the Oslo Agreement, the 2000 Clinton Agreement, or anything else about the Middle-East, doesn’t get in the way of them having a black-and-white view, an Absolute Political view, and then being upset when Palestinian children are killed but silent at the Passover Massacre - or noisy about the Passover Massacre, but curiously uninterested in the so-called collateral damage inflicted by the IDF. If there was one Absolute Truth I could believe in, that would be “No targeting Civilians!” But such a truth, I fear, is a Murray Cod in a river increasingly full of carp.

Not too surprising, then, that many thinkers and educators in our post-modern world go to the other extreme and argue that there is no such thing as truth. The very concept of “truth”, they would say, is just a con by those

that rule over us or, at the very best, meaningless. “Truth” and other grand-sounding terms like “Evil” are nothing more than social constructs – in other words they signify nothing universal in themselves; instead, they simply reflect the race, class, age, culture and gender of the person throwing around the term “truth”. So if one of my truths is that Shakespeare’s Hamlet is a vitally important and powerful piece of literature and I’ve never encountered a more worthwhile text to teach at secondary schools, the critics of that would argue that I’m only saying this because I’m a white, middle-class, middle-aged Anglo Celtic Ozzie male. My opinion on the merits of Hamlet is no more valid – valid is the term they would use instead of truth, – is no more valid than if someone else from a different perspective argued that the Jug-Head comic was their favourite text. My view is valid, the Jug-Head view is valid, on this matter and every other matter everybody’s view is valid, because everything is relative and there is no tool to measure all these equally valid views, especially since we’ve done away those old rusty weighing scales called Truth. The only problem with this, other than the slight possibility that Jug-Head might lack some of the – shall we say? – tones and shades of Hamlet’s character, is that such thinkers demand we accept the TRUTH of their proposition that...there IS NO TRUTH!

So where is the way forward? The answer, I believe, is small ‘t’ truths. And today I want to offer you one. It’s the kind of truth you can accept or reject as your life experience informs you. It’s the kind of truth that doesn’t divide the world into believers and non-believers, doesn’t lead to a world in which believers or insiders can ignore, hate, discard and even murder outsiders or non-believers. At any rate, one morning 7 or so years ago I was suddenly activated by a small ‘t’ truth at the very same time, paradoxically, that a Lutheran pastor was attempting to instil in me, along with 1,000 trapped teenagers, the value of his endlessly repeated One Absolute Truth. That is - God died for me on the Cross to save me from my sins, and all I had to was believe that He did and I would be saved for eternity. God, then, was a giant eraser in the sky. Because He had done the hard work, allowing Himself to be crucified on my behalf, all my sins could now be erased. Afterwards, I privately said to the Pastor: ‘So I don’t have to do anything to be saved?’ ‘Not a thing. You don’t have to do one single thing, Daryl. Just believe!’ ‘But that’s bizarre!’ I said. And his eyes lit up. He wasn’t angry with me. He was happy with me, because at last I had seemed to get it! ‘Of course it’s bizarre!’ he exclaimed. ‘That’s the beauty of it!’

Unfortunately for him, or unfortunately for me the Pastor might say, my interest had been taken by something else he had said during his sermon. While



outlining the religious calendar to the students, he said that other than Easter (with the possible exception of Christmas), the rest of the religious year was a kind of fill-in, where Jesus's parables and sayings get a guernsey. In other words, what Jesus of Nazareth actually said is minor, while what Christ Jesus did on the Cross is major. And it was at that moment that it dawned on me that there were, at least for me, two Jesuses. There was the Jesus of orthodox Christianity whose selfless act on the Cross was supposed to be some great gift to me, a gift I was, sadly, unable to appreciate, and the other Jesus who keeps saying all these strange, disconcerting things, even peculiar things. "Love your enemies...Lend without expecting anything in return. Your reward will be great."

This Jesus was telling me, in an urgent kind of voice it seemed, to accept the truth of something. But what was this something? Nothing here about the crucifixion. Nothing here of the bizarre notion that Jesus had saved me even before I got started on life's journey. Quite the opposite. Quite the opposite. What this Jesus seems to be saying is act. Act now. My small 't' truth I share today is one that would get me thrown out of possibly every Christian church in the land. My insight is that Jesus was the messenger, not the message. He was trying to tell anyone who would listen there is a universal law at work - "We reap what we sow." The Hindus call it Karma. The Japanese - "The Divine Wind". Young people call it "What goes around comes around". Shakespeare alludes to it when Macbeth says as he contemplates the repercussions of murdering King Duncan: "We still have judgement here; that we but teach/Bloody instructions, which being taught, return/To plague the inventor; this even-handed justice/Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice/To our own lips." Indeed, Romeo and Juliet, King Lear, Hamlet and all of his great plays - when I studied them with new eyes - were absolutely soaking in what Shakespeare himself might have called "the law of divine retribution". Even now when I hear one of those Christian sayings about "Beware the Lord" I find myself substituting "Law" for "Lord". So it's "Beware the Law". Thus: "The Law's judgement cometh and that right soon."

The more I reflect on my small 't' truth, this law of action and consequences, the more it confronts me. To save my soul, then, I must take the moral high road at every turn. For those who murder Israeli civilians there are consequences. For those who murder Palestinian civilians there are consequences. For those who murder - full-stop - there are consequences. In whatever name we encourage, accept, rationalize, or deny murder, murder is murder. And there are consequences. This is, I believe, the loop in which we are trapped. Action creates reaction. So when some social group, some ethnicity, some political group, some religious movement, some gender, some individual, wrongs me, I must consider my response very carefully. If

my sense of being wronged brings me to a darkness, to an anger, to a hatred, to a lust for vengeance, then the wrong-doer has wounded or undone me twice over.

I think many of Jesus's sayings alert us to the universal law of action and reaction, and how we might extricate ourselves from its often-destructive effect. We might demand justice exacted upon our enemies - fair, level-headed justice, for their good and for everyone's good - but we must do this only we know the whole story, only when we are not being hypocrites, and only when we do this with their best interests as well as our own are taken into consideration. Because if we don't, we only bring ourselves down. And thus the line from Jesus: "Love your enemies. Lend without expecting anything in return. Your rewards will be great."

"So, let us love our enemies, bless those who curse us, pray for those who have mistreated us. Help us be merciful, for the standard we use for judging, will the standard used against us."

*Daryl McCann*