



**Spirit of Life** Unitarian Fellowship  
PO Box 1356, Lane Cove NSW 1595  
Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre  
16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli  
(near Milsons Point Station)  
Tel: (02) 9428 2244

Website: [www.sydneyunitarians.org](http://www.sydneyunitarians.org)  
Editor: Jan Tendys

Volume 7, Issue 3

March, 2011

## Schedule of Services

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

**6 March**

**Rev. Steve Wilson**  
(Guest Speaker)

**“ A Faithless Faith? ”**

Is it possible and what is it? We look at the question of whether you can have a valid spiritual life without a leap of faith. When all is said and done, is some act of belief or "faith" required to seriously consider yourself in a religious practice?

**13 March**

**Laurence Gormley**

**"Arianism and Unitarianism:  
Are they related?"**

### ***13 MARCH WILL BE OUR AGM***

**20 March**

**Rev. Professor Sir Lloyd Geering** (Guest Speaker. See p..2)

**“How and Why the World’s Leading Scholars Reject the Traditional  
Claim that Jesus is the Son of God”**

Change of venue: **BRADFIELD PARK WELLBEING CENTRE**, 41 ALFRED ST., MILSONS POINT  
(just under the Harbour Bridge).

**27 March**

**Ross McLuckie**

**TBA**

**3 April**

**Jan Tendys**

**“Unitarianism in Africa”** (See p.6)

**10 April**

**Candace Parks**

**“What is Greatness?”**

**17 April**

**Janet Horton**

**“Is Religion the Opiate of the  
People?”**

**24 April**

**Ginna Hastings**

**“Why do I Choose Unitarianism?”**

I will discuss from a personal and also more general perspective why I enjoy being a Unitarian, and why I think it holds the answer for so many people.

## It Made my Blood Boil

*Ginna Hastings*

"Sacking the Sinful" was a cover story in a Sunday magazine with the "Herald" 3 weeks ago. It was about what goes on in church based charities and organizations, such as schools, who get government money to function. Some have an unwritten law - do not promote homosexuals no matter how qualified. However, they pointed out people who were just divorced and remarried, or sexually promiscuous, were fired too for not being penitent. The article was well researched and the author spoke to several organizations.

This is the letter (unpublished) that I wrote to the paper's editor:

"I read "Sacking the Sinful" with horrified interest. One must note that many, perhaps a majority, of Christians are not homophobes nor do they discriminate against employing people based on their sexual choices. As for religion-run organizations, it is well known that they have destroyed many careers even lives based on sexual politics, under the guise of religious freedom. The solution is simple: only organizations that follow national laws on antidiscrimination can accept government money to run their organizations. Church organizations can make their own choices in employment based upon religious freedom only with money they raise themselves. As a taxpayer, I resent politicians giving religious based organizations who receive government money, that my taxes paid for, an exemption from antidiscrimination laws, without public discussion or votes from general taxpaying citizens. The policy I suggest makes it clear and fair to all Australians!"

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## A Controversial Theologian

Rev. Professor Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, GNZM, CBE is Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at Victoria University, Wellington N.Z. He is also a fellow of the Westar Institute. He has been honoured as a Companion of the British Empire and was honoured as Principal Companion of the NZ Order of Merit. His latest book is "Such is Life"

## "SUCH IS LIFE, A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH ECCLESIASTES"

*A Personal Review by Eric Stevenson*

I find "Such is Life" to be not simply a scholarly translation into modern English of an ancient sacred text written by an anonymous author, calling himself "The Proclaimer". It demonstrates an ingenious procedure for inducting the reader of Ecclesiastes into the culture and circumstance pertaining during the period of its composition and therefore into the true meaning of The Proclaimer's message. **Lloyd Geering explains why this is an essential prerequisite not only for gaining an understanding of this old book, but also of all the Scriptures.** Despite the writer's churchy title, the words of seers like those of the Proclaimer were not about ecclesiastical or theocratic or prophetic utterance. He tells how such a non-religious document gained a place in the library of Wisdom Literature contained in the canon of the Bible. The seers were more concerned with our common human traits than our tribal identity or religious convictions (p.142), and concentrated on the wisdom required to confront and to cope with the basic problems of human existence.

**The reason why I think such a publication is so pertinent to progressive religious thought to-day is that fortuitously it is strikingly relevant to the spiritual ferment taking place in our time.** The advances in science and globalisation, the outcomes of what Lloyd refers to as the second Axial Age have rendered reassurances about our national heritage or the practice of our traditional religion relatively meaningless. E.g., The hymn "Land of Hope and Glory, God who made Thee mighty" is almost blasphemous! In his time, The Proclaimer spoke to an audience who gained no spiritual satisfaction from such assurances either. He rejected trite tribal explanations for life's difficulties (and successes), and advocated communal personal effort as the only thing left to combat adversity instead of "looking to God for deliverance by the miraculous in either nature or in human history" (p.13). By enabling The Proclaimer to utter words as relevant to our time as they were in his, Lloyd

has reflected my own questioning of, if not my disillusionment with, the religion of my youth.

**Part II of the book** (ch. 3-ch. 10) contains the imaginary close encounters referred to in the sub-title. By challenging, questioning and/or affirming the writer's proclamations, Lloyd not only explicates each topic under consideration. He also draws from it valuable restatements concerning a philosophy of life which is separate from and often contrary to conventional wisdom, as distinct from the wisdom of the Sage. E.g.

- **Chapter 4** is a treatise on a secular view of the ultimate, and the symbolic use of the word God by people who do not necessarily believe in him or her. (The Proclaimer relies on the cognitive abilities of human beings to conceptualise the mystery of the universe.) But it also ranges over an understanding of deism, theism, pantheism, monotheism, creationism, and determinism. (p.58)
- **The dialogue on Nature** (p.65) is about a lay person's understanding of evolution, cosmology and process theology. The Proclaimer's implied humanism does not fit with the fundamentalist's doctrine of original sin and rejects the idea of natural events being the work of a theistic deity. He is guardedly critical of thoughtless and often foolish religious utterances about natural disasters and maintains the sufficiency of man's natural wisdom and role as his sufficient and sole resource in coping with life's contingencies.
- **On Purpose in ch. 8** (p.113) Lloyd corrects a possible misreading of the text. The Proclaimer does not mean that our destiny is engineered by an out there God. He is simply saying that our human condition is just the way things are! And there is much more.

**In conclusion, Lloyd takes issue with The Proclaimer's ultra pessimistic attitude to life and to the possibility of actually gaining the wisdom which he has valued so highly. He makes a lot of The Proclaimer's admission that there is great value in people of good will working together. This, he says is a precursory statement to the aphorisms about love which were quoted by Jesus whom I understand would not have even claimed to have invented his most transporting aphorism, "Love your enemies". The Sage writer of Proverbs said something**

**like it. Our Sage of Nazareth belonged to the same non-authoritarian tradition. His favourite sayings therefore were not regarded as authoritative divine revelations because they were supposedly uttered by a god-man. (p.137). It was the ideas behind his sayings which gained credibility for his words which still warm our hearts. He pointed to a more optimistic view of life inspiring hope in his proclamation of the Kingdom. For him this meant people of good will, working together in a community of Love.**

Thank you, Lloyd, for what I found to be an excellent progressive read.

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**Happy to Loan**

I have many CD's and DVD's from The Learning Co., which are university lecture series from top US professors on various topics. They are not inexpensive to buy, and I have listened to several and learned a lot from them. One can listen to 1/2 hour a day and learn the guts of a whole college course. I'm happy to loan the to Spirit of Life friends if they just let me know. Here are some of the titles:

The Old Testament  
The New Testament  
God and Mankind: Comparative religions  
Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism  
The Historic Jesus  
Jesus and the Gospels I & II  
Hitler's Empire  
The Vikings  
The World's Great Art  
and more.

*Ginna Hastings*

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**Die Gedanken Sint Frei!**

**"The freedom of the mind is the beginning of all other freedoms." - Clinton Lee Scott**

**"I want a congregation that cherishes freedom and encourages open dialogue on questions of faith, one in which it is OK to change your mind."**

**Derby (UK) Unitarians website.**

## Plan Australia

**Is part of PLAN International, one of the world's largest community development organisations. One of its core functions is to allow people in the developed world to sponsor children in developing countries.**

### Ginna Hastings writes:

I have long been impressed with PLAN and have sponsored an Indian girl from aged six to 14. Unfortunately her family has moved to an area where PLAN isn't located, so I have been asked if I would like another child. This time I asked for two, both girls. I specifically asked for one in Pakistan due to the recent flooding. In PLAN's information sharing I learned the following about Pakistan:

- The country is just under twice the size of the US state of California.
- The population was 176,952,000 as of 2008.
- average per capita income is US\$ 980 per year.
- Life expectancy is 67 years.
- Infant mortality is 89 out of 1000 live births.
- 20.2 million people were affected by the floods, 1/8 of the total population of the country.
- PLAN estimates 10 million were children.
- 2 million homes were destroyed
- 1900 were killed

-The worst of the flooding was in the Punjab, the "bread basket" for the country, where whole villages and farms were destroyed; people often left their homes on short notice with nothing but the clothes on their backs, not even shoes.

-Plan has provided 250 million people with tents, and provided 162 safe havens for children, with 50 more planned. Here children can come, talk and play, and deal with their shock and grief. They are safe from attacks by others. Plan has provided: tents, tarps, food, clean drinking water, and health, hygiene kits, and mosquito nets.

-Plan has provided 250,000 people with 2 meals a day.

-Plan has given 18,000 families food.

-Plan helps 21,000 children in 100 communities

-Plan is running programs to increase awareness of child needs and safety in these circumstances.

Though I go through PLAN USA, there is a PLAN Australia in Melbourne. Sponsoring a child costs me \$40 US per month per child. I get letters from the child a few times a year, and am able to write to the child and exchange photos. I send small gifts at Christmas time. I found watching my Indian girl, Deepika, grow and mature and get an education thanks to my simple help to be most rewarding!

PLAN is also still actively working in Haiti.

**From Esprit editor:** Spirit of Life has made two donations to PLAN over the years and we had an address from a PLAN organiser.

PLAN Australia's website is

<http://www.plan.org.au/>

Phone 137526

JT

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### **From Brian Kiely's Africa blog**

(full texts at:

<http://uuwithoutborders.blogspot.com/> in the month of **February, 2008**)

#### **Kenya Day one**

The Kenyan Airway 777 flew down the Rift Valley as night began to fade. Gradually a friendly redness warmed the eastern night sky. To the east Mt. Kenya rose from the shadows and morning mist. By the time we landed at 7 a.m. it was full daylight.

We descended over the enormous wildlife reserve south of the city. There were acres and acres of empty space. I could see first, near a winding river, an elegant resort standing all alone. Then there was a line of fence, a roadway and shanty villages side by side with steel and cement plants. We landed easily, the graceful acacia trees silently witnessing from a distance.

Jomo Kenyatta Airport is alive with color and activity. It is cramped with 12 foot hallways but runs efficiently. By 7 a.m. the stores with food and liquor, Kenyan art

products and other items were open and starting to get busy. A remarkably diverse crowd of people from white backpackers to elegantly dressed women in tribal finery pushed down the halls.

I cleared immigration quickly. Outside I was met by our host team. We quickly loaded the car and I was ushered to the front seat where I met David, our driver, a man about my age. We all piled in to a small but serviceable old Toyota with some bags on laps and off we went.

It was already 20 degrees and climbing as we headed west on Mombassa Road passing those same factories I had seen from the air. Hundreds of people lined both sides of the road, walking on paths and on the red dust of the shoulder. Most were on their way to work. For those going farther there were flocks of white and often uniquely decorated mini buses. They more or less follow a route, stop anywhere, pack people in as best they can and charge flexible fares. They are the cheapest form of transportation. My favourite was the one with a large NBA silhouette decal on the back window showing a stunt basketball shot. Bolted to the roof was an old basketball net and ball swaying in the breeze.

The most obvious aspect of life in Nairobi is the people. Aside from the numbers streaming along the roadside, there are the street vendors dodging traffic and selling everything from newspapers to toys to car accessories. There are also a good number of bicycles, mostly of Chinese manufacture.

Within 15 minutes we are stuck in a nasty traffic jam. Traffic cops are few and far between, stop lights almost non-existent and vehicles move in an ever changing pattern of four or five imaginary lanes (some on dirt shoulders) with a mixture of courtesy and courage.

Closer to the city center there are fruit stands and other mini-market shanties lining sections of the roadways. All kinds of architecture are evident, some old, some new, shanties here and there. It's all jumbled together, but it doesn't seem messy to me. It's more a reflection of a people who are used to either going ahead on their own or just figuring out how to get by as best they can.

I am getting to know David, since I am in the front seat. He patiently answers my

questions, and asks many in return about global politics, Canada and a host of other topics. It's a pleasant conversation, although everyone in the car has a lot to say about the upcoming American elections.

They all like Obama with his Kenyan father.

As we talk of Kenya's recent violence, David says quietly, "It will be okay. We are a people used to many divisions. We talk about them. We know how to disagree and how to agree to disagree and still be friends. It will take time, but we will be okay."

### Kenya Day eight

A week later after the conference I joined Kevin Ragira and Shem Omwombo for an outing. We booked a taxi and headed east to Kitangela Estates where Kevin and his wife Divinah live. The 20 kilometre trip took nearly 90 minutes thanks to Nairobi's amazing and endless traffic.

To a westerner the word 'Estate' suggests something a little majestic and well to do. Kenyan Estates are, to privileged western eyes, anything but. This is an observation of difference and is not tinged with disrespect or even pity. **In fact, I sense that Kenyans are happier in general than westerners. When everyone is poor, they don't suffer from the material lust and 'gotta have it' that plagues the west. They do have real wants and needs (unlike me with only my imaginary ones), but beyond that they focus on family, friends and mutual support.**

Kevin's house is off the main dirt road, down an alley, perhaps a dozen feet wide, each side lined with a solid wall of brick abodes. We push through the metal door into a meticulously clean and comfortable brick room. There are three sofas that double as beds spread on each of the other walls brightened with embroidered seat covers. This is Divinah's handiwork.

There is no cooking area, no washing area and no toilet or running water. There are just two rooms with a small window in each. Kevin extravagantly buys Fantas at the tiny store across the alley. He then goes and gets his sons, his nephews and a friend from school to bring them to meet me. The boys come tumbling through the door. There are formal handshakes, a little conversation, many pictures and then off they run back to

class.

Kevin and Shem then take me into the other room hidden by a curtain. It is a bare cement cube for storage and work. There are two sewing machines. This is where Divinah works. They hope to find financing to start a home based clothing business.

We discuss details and agree that as a first project they should make chalice cloths for me to sell in North America. It seems that the impossibly inaccessible sum of \$200 US or so would get them started. I have read about micro-loans, but this is the first time I have come in touch with the reality of what one can do. I think we can make this work. I hope that we will find a way to connect UU's from around the world in some way to help make these small subsistence dreams a reality. Nothing is set-up yet, but we're working on it.

**I'll close this blog this way: I know this journey has changed me, but for now the feelings, sensations and friendships are too fresh for me to venture a guess as to how that change will sort itself out. I do know it will be harder to dismiss the Third World as 'them' anymore. I do know I will pay attention when I hear the word 'Africa' from now on. I am more convinced than ever that we in the West and the North will have to be prepared to make material sacrifices in order to bring economic justice to the world. It will not be enough to simply nod when politicians protecting national interests say that their economic policies will help the Third World and that rising economies will float all boats. Instead, I believe some real redistribution of wealth will have to occur.**

**Asante,**

**Brian**

**Note from your editor:**

I had originally intended to give you more in Esprit about Rev. Brian Kiely's thoughts on Africa, but have decided instead to use them, with acknowledgement, as the main part of a talk on Unitarianism in Africa together with a bit of updating by myself.

Brian Kiely is the minister of the Unitarian Church of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and is active in Unitarianism at the international level. JT.

## **Uh-Oh, Wrong Address!**

*A Minneapolis couple decided to go to Florida to thaw out during a particularly icy winter. They planned to stay at the same hotel where they spent their honeymoon 20 years earlier.*

*Because of hectic schedules, it was difficult to coordinate their travel schedules. So, the husband left Minnesota and flew to Florida on Thursday, with his wife flying down the following day.*

*The husband checked into the hotel. There was a computer in his room, so he decided to send an email to his wife. However, he accidentally left out one letter in her email address, and without realizing his error, sent the email.*

*Meanwhile, somewhere in Houston, a widow had just returned home from her husband's funeral. He was a minister who was called home to glory following a heart attack.*

*The widow decided to check her email expecting messages from relatives and friends. After reading the first message, she screamed and fainted.*

*The widow's son rushed into the room, found his mother on the floor, and saw the computer screen which read:*

*To: My Loving Wife  
Subject: I've Arrived  
Date: October 16, 2009*

*I know you're surprised to hear from me. They have computers here now and you are allowed to send emails to your loved ones. I've just arrived and have been checked in.*

*I've seen that everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then!!!! Hope your journey is as uneventful as mine was.*

*P.S. Sure is freaking hot down here!!!!*

**Contributed by Jan Tendys**

## **Out of the mouths of babes....**

MELANIE (age 5) asked her Granny how old she was. Granny replied she was so old she didn't remember any more. Melanie said, 'If you don't remember you should look in the back of your panties... Mine say five to six..'

STEVEN (age 3) hugged and kissed his mum good night. 'I love you so much that when you die I'm going to bury you outside my bedroom window..'

BRITTANY (age 4) had an ear ache and wanted a pain killer. She tried in vain to take the lid off the bottle. Seeing her frustration, her mum explained it was a child-proof cap and she'd have to open it for her. Eyes wide with wonder, the little girl asked: 'How does it know it's me?'

SUSAN (age 4) was drinking juice when she got the hiccups. 'Please don't give me this juice again,' she said, 'It makes my teeth cough.'

DJ (age 4) stepped onto the bathroom scale and asked: 'How much do I cost?'

CLINTON (age 5) was in his bedroom looking worried when his mum asked what was troubling him. He replied, 'I don't know what'll happen with this bed when I get married. How will my wife fit in it?'

MARC (age 4) was engrossed in a young couple that were hugging and kissing in a restaurant. Without taking his eyes off them, he asked his dad: 'Why is he whispering in her mouth?'

TAMMY (age 4) was with her mother when they met an elderly, rather wrinkled woman her mum knew. Tammy looked at her for a while and then asked, 'Why doesn't your skin fit your face?'

JAMES (age 4) was listening to a Bible story. His dad read: 'The man named Lot was warned to take his wife and flee out of the city but his wife looked back and was turned to salt.' Concerned, James asked: 'What happened to the flea?'

JACK (age 3) was watching his mum breast-feeding his new baby sister. After a while he asked: 'Mum why have you got two? Is one for hot and one for cold milk?'

**Jan Tendys has to take responsibility for this one too unless it was Candace who originally sent it ?**

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## **KIVA loans update**

(As of 6/2/2022)

The current status of the Spirit of Life Fellowship's KIVA loans are as follows -

Mach Nhen's Group in Cambodia (Activity: Farm Supplies)  
You Loaned: \$25.00  
Newly Repaid: \$1.91  
Total Repaid So Far: \$17.36 (69.44% of your loan)  
Repayment Status: Paying back on time

Bunthun Chhun's Group in Cambodia (Activity: Agriculture)  
You Loaned: \$25.00  
Newly Repaid: \$1.92  
Total Repaid So Far: \$16.34 (65.36% of your loan)  
Repayment Status: Paying back on time

So far we are satisfied with KIVA as a microcredit organisation. We are aware that not all microcredit programs are equally good and it is up to the investor to beware and make sure that the borrower is not being exploited.

See "Microcredit, the good the Bad and the Ugly" by David Korten.

<http://cswiretalkback.tumblr.com/post/3091138012/microcredit-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly>

**Jan Tendys**

## Jottings

We are very pleased to have Steve Wilson, Spirit of Life's former visiting Pastor from the United States, visiting us again. He's been out and about letterboxing for our Lloyd Geering talk as well as picking up on past contacts.

Good to see Geoff and Andrew Usher too. Andrew played for us on the day of our double Birthday Party (Candace's birthday and the Fellowship's anniversary). It was great to have a piano again. Geoff Matthews was with us and a fine sprinkling of other visitors.

The party was very enjoyable as usual, thanks mainly to Candace, Ginna, Caz and Peter, Sherman and Jane. Most delightful of all was to see Helen looking so chipper. Good to hear both she and Col have had an encouraging reports.

It was a fundraiser for our Emergency Fund and, sadly, it seems the world has no lack of emergencies. Our hearts go out to the people of Christchurch. For the Arab world we can only hold out the hope that people power will prevail and that we don't see just another set of authoritarian regimes steal the effort and sacrifice of so many.

**Jan Tendys**

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

**Please note that Esprit is assembled usually in the last week of the month so longer items should be handed in or sent by the second last Sunday of the month. Items for the Schedule of Services (talk titles etc) should be in by the Friday of the last week. Variations to this timetable may be necessitated by circumstances.**

Preferred method is as an MS-WORD or email to jtendys@bigpond.com  
Hardcopy (or electronic media) submissions can be hand-delivered to Jan or posted to:  
Spirit of Life  
PO Box 1356  
LANE COVE NSW 1595

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

**Do you have a topic of a spiritual nature that you would like to share with the congregation?**

As Unitarians, we support an "Open Pulpit" and invite members of the congregation to lead the service if they so wish.

**Just let Candace know what you would like to speak about and when you are available and we will fit you into the schedule.**

Also, please feel free to give us your feedback on any of the services. This is the best way to ensure the services address the needs of the congregation.

**Would you care to join us? Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter** If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring 9428-2244, consult our website [www.sydneyunitarians.com](http://www.sydneyunitarians.com) or speak to one of our members before or after the Sunday service. Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee.