



## Schedule of Services

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

**6 May, Rev. Geoff Usher: "In What Do We Trust?"**

When people ask the question: "Do you believe in God?" they usually mean: "Do you believe in MY God?" And usually, if we are to be truthful, the only reply we as Unitarians can give must be: "Probably not."

**13 May, No meeting.**

**Javanese tree shrew**  
Photo Wikipedia



**20 May, Martin Horlacher: "Chaos & Gaia: The Maccabean Revolt, Hellenistic Philosophy, and Ideology Against Reason."**

Small stones can cast large ripples. Depending on how you look at it, the Maccabean Revolt of 167 BC was either the triumph of an oppressed people against their oppressors, or a missed opportunity for humanity as a whole to embrace enlightenment. Had Hellenistic philosophy won the day, as opposed to Abrahamic religion, how differently might the last 2,100 years of human history leading up to today have turned out?

**27 May, Morandir Armson: " 'Colourful, Exuberant, and Happy': An Examination of Religious Festivals."**

The world is full of festivals. You can throw tomatoes, run with bulls, or roll cheeses. Far more interesting, however, are festivals rooted in religious beliefs and cultural observances. They give you a glimpse into the rich human imagination and have a serious side: commemorating the dead, imploring the help of saints or gods, giving hope for a better future. This presentation will examine a number of religious festivals, seeking to find some of their core features.

## The loving, reasoned path is the right one for us.

*Ginna Hastings*

I think the main issue for us as UU's communicating to outsiders about our religion is to tell them what it means to us as individuals in a concise reasoned way. Going too much into our faith journey is off putting. Hand them a copy of the Seven Principles and move on. If there is a gap there where the listener might form an interest in UU, then it can happen.

For me, it's the Seven Principles which are the moral basis of our shared faith. They give authority to our faith. If we stopped to consider these wise principles in every decision we made, we would not go wrong - even if we go against the grain around us. Every great religion claims a great moral base of belief, so let us not forget ours.

Another thing I also like about Unitarian Universalism is that our intentions are almost always good - for the greatest good for the greatest number, but respecting differences and rights. Rugged individuals who are libertarian would not be comfortable in our midst. People who worship Jesus as a personality cult would find themselves uncomfortable with our reasoned approach to attending to the welfare of all. We don't need a worshipped personality to motivate us to be loving to others. We just know that the loving, reasoned path is the right one for us. It is also something we, as a small religion, need to put more effort into motivating one another in living this way in our complicated and challenging society.

What do we gain by being a UU? I feel loved and accepted by other like thinkers. I don't have to bargain about the slavish following of rules. I don't have to buy my way into heaven - which may or may not exist - by what I do here and now. If I do my best to live the principles, then the existence of an after life is immaterial. I can work towards making this a better world here and now, with pride in what I do. With love and reason and humility, I'm in the driver's seat of my life.

I got this off the UU website, and I think it wraps it up. Perhaps I should memorise it!

**Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote seven Principles, which we hold as strong values and moral guides. We live out these Principles within a "living tradition" of wisdom and spirituality, drawn from sources as diverse as science, poetry, scripture, and personal experience.**

**As Rev. Barbara Wells in Hove explains, "The Principles are not dogma or doctrine, but rather a guide for those of us who choose to join and participate in Unitarian Universalist religious communities."**

**1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;**

**2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;**

**3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;**

**4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;**

**5th Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;**

**6th Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;**

**7th Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.**

<https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles>

*Fellowship :*

*friendly association, especially with people who share one's interests.*

*"they valued fun and good fellowship as the cement of the community"*

*companionship, companionability, sociability, comradeship, fraternization, camaraderie,*

*friendship, mutual support, mutual respect, mutual liking; amiability, amity, affability, geniality, kindness,.....*

## Pooh Bear Wisdom

*Contributed by Caz Donnelly*

Author A.A. Milne created some of the most thoughtful and profound characters when he penned his Winne-the-Pooh novels and many of the quotes that were born from it have life lessons we can all learn from.

.... If you are a parent, perhaps you should consider tracking down the books, TV series, and movies to introduce your children to the wonders of this bear in the forest.

### ***On love:***

“How do you spell ‘love’?” – Piglet

“You don’t spell it...you feel it.” – Pooh

### ***On trusting your ability to deal with anything:***

Promise me you’ll always remember:  
You’re braver

than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.

### ***On the importance of the little things:***

Sometimes, said Pooh, the smallest things take up the most room in your heart.

### ***On being present:***

“What day is it?”

“It’s today,” squeaked Piglet.

“My favourite day,” said Pooh.

### ***On the futility of worry:***

“Supposing a tree fell down, Pooh, when we were underneath it?”

“Supposing it didn’t,” said Pooh after careful

thought.

Piglet was comforted by this.

### ***On knowing by simply being:***

Sometimes, if you stand on the bottom rail of a bridge and lean over to watch the river slipping slowly away beneath you, you will suddenly know everything there is to be known.

### ***On individuality:***

The things that make me different are the things that make me.

*A.A. Milne with Christopher Robin and Pooh looking on. (The Telegraph UK)*



### ***On comfort zones:***

You can’t stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes.

### ***On grati-***

### ***tude:***

Piglet noticed that even though he had a very small heart, it could hold a rather large amount of gratitude.

### ***On the difference between knowledge and understanding:***

“Rabbit’s clever,” said Pooh thoughtfully.

“Yes,” said Piglet, “Rabbit’s clever.”

“And he has Brain.”

“Yes,” said Piglet, “Rabbit has Brain.”

There was a long silence.

“I suppose,” said Pooh, “that that’s why he never understands anything.”

<https://www.aconsciousrethink.com/3112/20-utterly-profound-winnie-pooh-quotes-make-smile/?c=ACR>

## Lloyd Geering on Life

*Eric Stevenson*

In his latest book which relates the story of his own life ("Wrestling with God", 2006), Lloyd describes how his thinking has continued to evolve over the years. He writes that he has come to believe, "that the most awe inspiring mystery in this vast universe is life itself. We observe it around us and we experience it within us. But by the time we have developed sufficient self awareness to reflect on it, we have already been experiencing life first hand for quite some years. Unfortunately this means that we tend to take life for granted and so miss the wonder of it. It seems to be possible to go through life and enjoy what it offers, without ever stopping to recognise what an extraordinary phenomenon life is. And the more we learn about the vastness of the physical universe, the more miraculous the presence of life within it seems to be."

When I meet under the banner of the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship and sing its theme song at the close of every service, I find Lloyd's words very affirming. They are written by a friendly author who has the same mind set as myself and those with whom I look forward to meeting, and they aptly describe the non-theistic, nature of the spirit of life which our theme song personalises.

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### **The Good News in the Present Time**

*Geoffrey R Usher*

On 27 February 1992 the Annual General Meeting of the Women's League within the Sheffield and District Association was held in the Hollis Room at Upper Chapel. Chapel member Ada Cartwright was installed as the President of the District Women's League at that meeting. At the end of the meeting, as part of the Closing Devotions which she conducted, Ada read a piece by an unknown writer. It was called "The Good News in the Present Time". I liked it and I asked her for a copy of it, and I begin by sharing it now,

in full.

I feel a bit uncomfortable when people who have been Christians for years insist on telling their conversion experiences. It's not the stories that make me uncomfortable, but the thought that they ought to have something much more recent to communicate about their Christian life. A poet commented:

Show me how  
The Christ you talk about Is living now.  
Your holy hearsay is not evidence:  
Give me the good news in the present tense.

The living truth is what I long to see. I cannot lean upon what used to be.

The good news in the present tense. Something seen, not in the stories of half a generation ago, but in those of today. Tell people what happened this morning, or the day before, because that's the living faith of our relationship with God now. The Christian life is for living, not just remembering. It's an experience of immediacy - not in the sense of undisciplined and thoughtless action, but in living with God today, rather than with the memory of what used to be.

Lord of today,  
I'm here, waiting.  
Today, like any other day,  
yet like no other day that ever was.  
Unique, as I am unique.  
Different.

The routine, the well trodden path, is there. Yet each day is punctuated by small surprises. And today brings its share of smiles and sudden laughter, of irritation and sharp surge of anger. Fast moving clouds and sunshine bursts, scudding across the landscape. Light and shadow.  
Lord, today is your gift to me.  
Help me to turn it into my gift to you.

Each today pushes back the past into history, and in the long perspective I can see your hand at work.  
For good. For my good.  
And from that view

I can turn to face the prospect of today.  
But from that lookout point of past mercies,  
I can leave it, again, in your hands.  
Knowing that you are the same,  
yesterday, today, and forever.

But today is my concern.  
Good news in the present tense.  
Not just for me, Lord—  
although in honesty,  
that's where my interest begins—  
but for those with whom I live  
and work and talk.  
Make me an instrument for good.  
A small focus of your healing  
in a worried world.  
I thank you for yesterday,  
I leave tomorrow in your hands.

Today is yours and mine.

**Like the unknown writer, I "feel a bit uncomfortable" sometimes - especially when I am confronted by people whose earnest wish is to convert me:- to persuade me that their particular religious sect - their view of Biblical Truth - their interpretation of the Will of God - is the only true and right one.**

**The curious thing is that they spend their time and energy in arguing only by reference to the Bible. Their reference point is two thousand years old.**

**I am more interested - and more likely to be convinced - if someone wants to tell me about a local organisation that is trying to do something - to alleviate suffering, or improve the lot of people in the local community.**

Your holy hearsay is not evidence.  
Give me the good news in the present tense.

The living truth is what I long to see.  
I cannot lean upon what used to be.

Show me how  
The Christ you talk about is living now.

**When I was at the Sydney Unitarian Church I joined and became actively involved in organisations which I felt were actually doing things. No-one ever persuaded me to**

**join a group - religious or otherwise - on the strength of stories from two thousand years ago.** But I joined Amnesty International because it works for the release of people held in prison right now because of their beliefs:- prisoners of conscience who have committed no crime except to express (or be suspected of holding) beliefs which are not acceptable to the people in power. And Amnesty International works for the abolition of torture - the torture of people today, not the suffering inflicted on Jesus and the martyred saints of Christendom and all the millions of nameless, innocent, ordinary people of past centuries who were caught up in the tyranny of their times. And I spent most of those fifteen years working in various ways with the United Nations Association of Australia, because it is concerned with supporting the work of the United Nations **now**, and the UN's efforts for disarmament, non-violent resolution of conflict, international co-operation and understanding, health, education and security for all people today, and tomorrow. I continued to work with the UN Association in Sheffield, and back here in Sydney now.

The good news in the present tense. Something seen, not in the stories of half a generation ago, but in those of today. Tell people what happened this morning, or the day before, because that's the living faith of our relationship with God now. The Christian life is for living, not just remembering. It's an experience of immediacy - not in the sense of undisciplined and thoughtless action, but in living with God today, rather than with the memory of what used to be.

I like the books of the American Unitarian minister and writer, Robert Fulghum. Let me share with you a story from his first and perhaps most famous book, All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten. It's about Elias Schwartz.

Elias Schwartz repairs shoes. He's short and round and bald and single and middle-aged and Jewish. "An old-fashioned cobbler," says he, nothing more, nothing less. I happen to be convinced that he is really the 145th incarnation of the Haiho Lama.

See, the Haiho Lama died in 1937, and the monks of the Sa-skya monastery have been searching (since then) for his reincarnation without success. The New York Times carried the story. ... The article noted that the Lama would be recognized by the fact that he went around saying and doing wise things in small, mysterious ways and that he would be doing the will of God without understanding why.

Through some unimaginable error in the cosmic switching yards, the Haiho Lama has been reincarnated as Elias Schwartz. I have no doubts about it.

My first clue came when I took my old Bass loafers in for total renewal. The works. Elias Schwartz examined them with intense care. With regret in his voice he pronounced them not worthy of repair. I accepted the unwelcome judgment. Then he took my shoes, disappeared into the back of the shop, and I waited and wondered. He returned with my shoes in a stapled brown bag. For carrying, I thought. When I opened the bag at home that evening, I found two gifts and a note. In each shoe, a chocolate-chip cookie wrapped in waxed paper. And these words in the note: "Anything not worth doing is worth not doing well. Think about it.

Elias Schwartz."

The Haiho Lama strikes again.

**Robert Frost was once interviewed by a newspaper reporter who asked if he believed the nation (USA) had much of a future. The poet replied: "Our founders didn't believe in the future. They believed the future in!"**

There is passive believing and active believing. Passive believing gives lip service to this statement and that conviction. It venerates the conversion experience of the past. It is based on holy hearsay. Active believing is vigorous, alive, concerned with today, confirming one's affirmations with deeds.

We have to prepare for the future. We have to lay the groundwork so that our tomorrows will eventually rise from the foundations of our present. There will be surprises, set-backs, disappointments; but we must do more than preserve the past. We

must look to the present for the work in hand, and ensure that today's action will be the best foundation for tomorrow.

The good news in the present tense.

The routine, the well trodden path, is there. Yet each day is punctuated by small surprises.

Lord, today is your gift to me.  
Help me to turn it into my gift to you.

Today is my concern.  
Good news in the present tense.  
Not just for me, Lord -  
although in honesty, that's where my interest begins - but for those with whom I live and work and talk. Make me an instrument for good.  
A small focus of your healing in a worried world. I thank you for yesterday.  
I leave tomorrow in your hands.

Today is yours and mine.

Amen.

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**(Emphases by the present editor JT)**  
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**Wiping out plastics.**  
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(From UK but can be applied to Australia)

**1) Packaging that doesn't include recycling instructions** We know the basics: tins, glass and paper yes; plastic film no. But what about those trays that fish comes in, with no information on them? Manufacturers and retailers should be forced to label every piece of packaging, including lids and fastenings – so we know what to do with them. No more hovering around bins, tormented by the fear of contamination.

**2) Plastic film** We use more than a million tonnes a year of the stuff, most of which isn't recycled. We can't eliminate it overnight, but please can we start trying to reduce its use – and invent biodegradable alternatives?

**3) Plastic forks** More ubiquitous than ever, as salads and other non-hand-held lunch options proliferate, these are so obviously dreadful – never more so than when they come in plastic packets with knives and napkins no one needs – that they must be stopped. Biodegradable alternatives only, or cleverly designed portable, reusable ones. (These exist but mainly in camping shops – we need them on display at checkouts across the land.)

**4) Plastic bottles** The government (UK) has announced a deposit return scheme (you stick bottles and cans into a reverse vending machine, it spits out cash), and the Glastonbury festival has announced a ban. We need to go further, faster. Drinking fountains must become the standard in public and private places. Now!

**5) Rubbish labels on rubbish bins** One day I will do an experiment and watch public recycling bins get emptied and sorted. My hunch is that contamination is virtually universal, and these bins don't work. Some people can't be bothered to sort their litter, but it's not all our fault. Standing there with a plastic spoon, a coffee cup with plastic lid, a greasy sandwich packet with a film lid, a napkin and a plastic pot – with no tap to rinse off any food residue – it's not obvious what to do. Suggestion: taps located so that they could also be used for rinsing.

**6) Councils with different recycling rules** This is tricky, because a healthy waste market ought to mean plenty of competition, with the councils who buy these services able to shop around. But for ordinary people it's confusing, as some authorities collect mixed recycling while others demand stringent sorting; and what is deemed recyclable varies too. For people who live and work in different local authority areas (extremely common in and around London), it's hard to keep track. We need homogenisation.

**7) Plastic cups, including coffee cups** Reusable and biodegradable alternatives only (see cutlery, above).

**8) Arctic oil exploration** Some people think recycling is a displacement activity for people who can't really bear to shrink their carbon footprints. But while fussing over plastic forks

in an airport lounge before boarding a long-haul flight might not be strictly rational, I disagree. Plastics are made from natural gas and crude oil. The problem of plastic pollution is linked to fossil fuels. By supporting the protection of the Arctic – where David Cameron once hugged a husky and Donald Trump is currently pushing exploration – Michael Gove could send a signal that the UK government's concern about pollution is real.

**By Susanna Rustin for the (UK) Guardian article “Gove’s cotton bud ban is feeble; here’s how we can wipe out plastic.”**

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/20/michael-gove-cotton-bud-ban-wipe-out-plastic>

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**From an ad by Avani, a firm making a possibly totally biodegradable alternative to plastic bags—yet to be fully scrutinised.**

<https://www.avanieco.com/portfolio-item/bio-cassava-bag/>

As we recently learned, much of our planet's supply of drinking water is infested with plastic microfibers. Single-use plastic items like shopping bags and drinking straws are some of the culprits.

To combat the impact of discarded plastic bags on the environment, an Indonesian company called Avani has created a single-use bag you'd swear was plastic—but which is in fact made of Cassava (Yucca), an edible root.

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## **What happened to our bubblers?**

The City of Sydney provides a map to show they still exist - sparsely - throughout Sydney:

<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/explore/facilities/public-toilets/water-bubblers>

None at all is shown in Centennial Park.

**Supposedly many have been done away with by Councils because they were vandalised. An excuse? Or were our forebears less prone to vandalism ?**

## The Interdependent Web of all Existence

“I became totally absorbed into this forest existence. It was an unparalleled period when aloneness was a way of life; a perfect opportunity, it might seem, for meditating on the meaning of existence and my role in it all. But I was far too busy learning about the chimpanzees' lives to worry about the meaning of my own. I had gone to Gombe to accomplish a specific goal, not to pursue my early preoccupation with philosophy and religion.

Nevertheless, those months at Gombe helped to shape the person I am today-I would have been insensitive indeed if the wonder and the endless fascination of my new world had not had a major impact on my thinking. All the time I was getting closer to animals and nature, and as a result, closer to myself and more and more in tune with the spiritual power that I felt all around.

For those who have experienced the joy of being alone with nature there is really little need for me to say much more; for those who have not, no words of mine can even describe the powerful, almost mystical knowledge of beauty and eternity that come, suddenly, and all unexpected. The beauty was always there, but moments of true awareness were rare. They would come, unannounced; perhaps when I was watching the pale flush preceding dawn; or looking up through the rustling leaves of some giant forest tree into the greens and browns and the black shadows and the occasionally ensured bright fleck of blue sky; or when I stood, as darkness fell, with one hand on the still warm trunk of a tree and looked at the sparkling of an early moon on the never still, softly sighing water of Lake Tanganyika.”

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“And I thought how sad it was that, for all our sophisticated intellect, for all our noble aspirations, our aggressive behavior was not just similar in many ways to that of the chimpanzees – it was even worse. Worse because human beings have the potential to rise above their baser instincts, whereas chimpanzees probably do not.”

— Jane Goodall, Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey

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### Would you care to join Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship?

**Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter.** *Full membership \$50 concession \$20*. Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher for an application form at the Sunday service.

***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 Esprit.***

It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Esprit editor by the 15th of each month: jantendys@yahoo.com.au or hand to Jan Tendys at the Sunday service.

***Do you have a topic of a spiritual / ethical 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. *Please see Caz Donnelly at the Sunday service*

Fellowship contact 0466 940 461

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