



Quest



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

Summer 2010



ELIZABETH GASKELL, UNITARIAN WRITER

This year, our British confreres celebrated the bicentenary of the birth of the English Unitarian novelist and short story writer, Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell. She was born Elizabeth Stevenson on 29 September 1810 in Chelsea, which was then on the outskirts of London. Her Scottish father, William Stevenson, had been a minister in Manchester until he resigned in protest against paid ministry. Her mother, Elizabeth Holland, was from a Midlands Unitarian family that was connected with the Wedgwoods and Darwins. She died a year after the birth and Elizabeth was brought up by her aunt in Knutsford, Cheshire.

Over 1821–27, she attended a boarding school in Warwickshire run by the Byerley sisters, great-nieces of Josiah Wedgwood, after which she lived in Newcastle and Manchester. In the latter city, she met Rev. William Gaskell, junior minister of the Cross Street (Unitarian) Chapel and an aspirant writer, marrying him in 1832. They had four children, so her writing career began as piecemeal jottings in her spare time. The Gaskells' social circle included such writers as Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens, who later commissioned Elizabeth to write ghost stories and articles for his magazine, *Household Words*.

Her first published work was a Gothic descriptive essay in 1840 and her first novel, *Mary Barton*, came out in 1848 – a graphic depiction of the lives of the millworkers in Manchester. The book created a sensation and, although it was at first published anonymously, her identity quickly became known. The next novel, *Cranford*, was based on her childhood home of Knutsford and had a strong feminist theme. Then came *Ruth*, about an unmarried mother (copies of which were burned by her husband's outraged parishioners!) and *North and South*, which contrasted life in the mill towns with that of their wealthy London owners.

In 1857, she wrote the first biography of her friend, Charlotte Brontë, and her last novel, *Wives and Daughters: An Everyday Story*, was almost finished when she died on 12 November 1865. She was buried in the cemetery of the 300-year-old Brook Street Chapel in Knutsford, where many of her ancestors and family now rest. Over her 25-year publishing career, Gaskell also produced a large number of novellas and short stories. She is now regarded as one of the most prominent writers of the Victorian era.

The aforementioned novels have all been made into BBC productions and it would be good if they were televised here. Most of the bicentenary commemorations were fittingly centred in Knutsford and Manchester, but also at Westminster Abbey and Poets' Corner. There is a memorial plaque to Elizabeth Gaskell in the recently rebuilt Cross Street Chapel, which can be seen on its website (www.cross-street-chapel.org.uk).

WHAT IS UNITARIANISM?

By Rev. Peter Ferguson

Are we simply a very liberal branch of the wider Church or have we moved away from our Christian moorings and are now in the process of becoming a quite separate and distinct religion in our own right?

Unitarianism began as a movement within the Roman Catholic Church in Italy in the early 16th century at about the same time as Martin Luther and the emerging Protestant Reformation. From the outset, it was branded as heretical and Unitarians were persecuted across several European countries, including Italy, France, Spain, Rumania and Poland.

Unitarians first appeared in England in the 17th century and the movement was described by William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury, as a “damnable and cursed heresy”. In the mid-17th century, the British Parliament passed an Act imposing the death penalty upon those who denied the doctrine of the Trinity. Several Unitarians were burnt at the stake, both in England and Scotland. It was only in the early 19th century that a more tolerant attitude developed and Unitarians were given the legal right to exist.

Unitarians, however, have never been accepted as a part of the Church, but rather were considered as heretics for not accepting that God consisted of three equal persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And so, for most of the second half of the 20th century, the British Unitarians were granted only associate member status within the British Council of Churches without voting rights. Nevertheless Unitarians were at the forefront of progressive social and political reform including the abolition of slavery, implementation of workers' rights, the abolition of child labour, the struggle against racial discrimination, and promoting the rights of women.

In the early '90s, even that link was broken with the formation of a new ecumenical body: the Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland. The Unitarian application for membership was rejected outright. So they applied for observer status. This was also refused. The Unitarians, however, were permitted to become members of the Council's ancillary bodies such as Christian Aid and the Racial Justice Network. (Unitarians are clearly useful when it comes to matters of social justice!)

During the past 20 years or so, the liberal Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland (NSPCI) has gradually distanced itself from the General Assembly of British Unitarians. The NSPCI has a long history with the Unitarian movement. For example, from 1928 the ministerial candidates of the NSPCI attended and trained at the two Unitarian colleges in Oxford and Manchester. (1) In recent years, however, the NSPCI has stopped sending its candidates to the Unitarian colleges. Clergy of the NSPCI are no longer included on the lists of clergy of the General Assembly.

From this evidence it would seem clear that the Unitarians in Britain are no longer viewed as being part of the Christian Church. In Perth, the Western Australian Unitarians considered applying for membership of the W.A. Conference of Churches. When it was discovered that the Constitution was unambiguously Trinitarian, the idea was abandoned.

So the question is: if we are not part of the Christian world, where do we belong? Are we now a religion with our own distinct beliefs and practices? If so, is there a word that better describes us than Unitarianism?

In a pre-conference questionnaire for the ICUU-sponsored workshop in Brisbane in August 2010, Unitarian delegates from around Australia and New Zealand described themselves in various ways but all included the description “humanist”. The core values of the delegates included the search for truth and justice and the practice of love and compassion – a typically humanist view of life. In regard to belief in God and the supernatural, the delegates believed that we are able to decide for ourselves what is meaningful. Our congregations include atheists, agnostics, free thinkers, rationalists and those who simply believe in some higher power or spirit of life.

Unitarians have always had difficulties with the confected mythological Christ of Saint Paul, which eventually led to the dogma of the Three-Person Godhead – the Trinity. Historically the word ‘Unitarian’ is derived from the controversies of the past. Given the fact that most Unitarians are agnostic, atheist or have

some other concept of a higher power, it could be argued that the word 'Unitarian' is no longer a useful description of our beliefs.

So do we now jettison the word 'Unitarian', as some have suggested? Do we describe ourselves as religious humanists? Perhaps, but the description lacks distinctiveness. On the other hand, if we redefine the word 'Unitarian', not in terms of belief in one God but rather the belief that life is unitary and that we are all part of a single interdependent web of existence. In this way we can keep our name and move away from the historic controversy surrounding the nature of God. The word 'Unitarian' is far more inclusive than the word 'humanist' which appears to relate only to primates of the human kind. Unitarianism includes everything – all the other forms of life which inhabit the Earth, from the humble plankton to the rhinoceros.

The popular definition of religion is a system of belief and worship of the supernatural. But, in the strictest sense, religion has to do with the values and belief systems people live by. Why should religion be the exclusive preserve of metaphysics and the supernatural? The biological scientist Julian Huxley's book, *Religion without Revelation*, presents powerful arguments for humanism to be seen as a religion or faith.

Unitarians, then, are humanists who have gone beyond its narrower definitions and include all forms of life.

Humanism had its origin in ancient Athens. Its ruler Pericles (c. 495–429 BCE) liberated its citizens from tribal bonds and created the first open society in recorded history, while the neighbouring city, Sparta, represented the closed society with totalitarian rule.

Among the early Greek philosophers was Protagoras (c. 490–420 BCE), who taught that all human values came from human experience and not from divine laws.

Another early humanist was Socrates (469–399 BCE), a pioneer for the cause of free enquiry. Socrates' ideas became a threat to the religious leaders of Athens. At age 70 he was found guilty of denying the Athenian gods and sentenced to death by drinking hemlock.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) taught that human welfare was the benchmark for moral behaviour. He believed that human beings could only achieve their full potential if they could be freed from the fear of the gods.

Epicurus (341–270 BCE) believed that everything was ultimately explainable without supernatural causes, that the purpose of life is enjoyment and that it is through good conduct that we find happiness.

Interestingly, it was St Augustine who in the 5th century slandered the Epicureans as greedily indulging in the pleasures of the flesh. To the contrary, Epicurus lived a frugal life and believed that peace of mind came through moderation in all things.

This essay does not touch on the philosophies of Asia and the Middle East, where significant progress was being made on several fronts, but rather focuses on Western civilization and thought.

Tragically when the Catholic Church gained ascendancy in the 5th century CE, its totalitarian policies swiftly extinguished the light of reason. The great academies and schools of philosophy were closed down and Europe entered into the Dark Ages. It was about a thousand years later that the Renaissance brought to life fresh interest in the philosophies of ancient Greece. The Renaissance humanists were all Christians and included Erasmus, Thomas More, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, to name a few. For the first time in many centuries, the teachings of the monolithic Catholic Church were being challenged.

It was at this time that Unitarian ideas focussing on the oneness of God began to re-emerge. With the advent of the Enlightenment, Unitarians were at the forefront of progressive thought: Isaac Newton, Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Morse, George Stephenson, John Locke, Josiah Wedgwood, Charles Dickens, Alexander Graham Bell and Ralph Waldo Emerson. All of them blend in seamlessly with the broad humanist movement of the previous 2500 years.

The American Humanist Manifesto of 1933 illustrates much of what we believe about our lives and our interrelationships one with another. We would add, however, a clause expressing our responsibility towards all the other life forms that share their lives with us.

“We long for and strive towards a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty where differences are resolved constructively without resorting to violence.

The joining of individuality and interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice and opportunity for all.

We aspire to this vision that humanity has the ability to progress towards its higher ideals.

The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.”

(1) The Non-subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland derives its name and its liberal and tolerant identity from early eighteenth century Presbyterian ministers refusing to subscribe to, or sign, the Westminster Confession, a standard Reformed (Calvinist) statement of faith, at their ordination, forming in 1725 their Presbytery of Antrim. A similar phenomenon led to the 1830 creation of the Remonstrant Synod of Ulster. The two bodies created the Non-subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland (NSPCI) in 1910. The Synod of Munster became part of the NSPCI in 1935. Many non-subscribing Presbyterians keep close contact with the Unitarians and are sometimes identified as such, though they are distinct bodies.
[from Wikipedia]

[This is the text of Rev. Ferguson’s address to the ANZUUA Growth Workshop in Brisbane on the weekend of 20–22 August 2010.]

A UNITARIAN SCHOOL IN AUSTRALIA?!

In December, the Sydney and Adelaide churches received a visit from Andrew Nicholas, president and founder to the UU Community Schools Campaign. The UUCSC is a registered charity in New York and has Related Organization status with the UUA. Their official launch is in January 2011 but they already have their management and personnel in place: a Board and support staff, an Advisors Council, and teams for Building Design, Curriculum, Finance, Legal aspects, and Operations and Projects. Members of the public with appropriate skills and/or interests are invited to join these teams and help the leadership to develop their ideas and the campaign.

This invitation presumably extends to the whole U*U world, as it is intended to found three schools in the US, one elsewhere in the Americas (probably Canada or Mexico) and one further afield – Australia and the Philippines are of interest. While they will likely be located in urban areas, they will be boarding schools and the students can come from anywhere. It is hoped that the schools will be fully endowed, so that admission will not depend on a student’s ability to pay. There will also be minimal entry requirements, in order to attract students from a wide range of backgrounds.

Andrew had a mid-week dinner with the Sydney UC Executive and said he sometimes attended that church in 2000 while studying at Sydney University. Unfortunately, his intended meeting with the Melbourne leadership fell through because his flight was delayed. However, on 12 December, he attended the service at Adelaide UC and later addressed the congregation.

He explained that the planned schools would have about 40 students in Years 9–12, providing for a high staff-to-student ratio. The academic curriculum will be that of the International Baccalaureate Diploma but the philosophy will be based on the Seven Principles, with strong emphasis on service: to the school, to disadvantaged people in the local community, and to global social justice and/or environmental causes. The boarding environment will involve students in the day-to-day management of the school, such as cleaning, cooking and peer tutoring.

The campaign is now seeking pledges of at least \$US 5000 and the first school will be founded when \$1 m. has been raised. The ANZUUA Management Committee has requested that Andrew provide details of the proposed funding model for discussion. Andrew regretted that the budget did not cover a visit to New Zealand on this trip but he is keen to go there on a future occasion.

[Readers are urged to visit the UUCSC website (www.uucommunityschools.org) for more information. Our thanks to Jane Brooks for providing the additional information from the Adelaide meeting.]



International
Council of
Unitarians and
Universalists

ICUU NEWS

Szabó Árpád Memorial Fund

New USCS President

Unitarian Tours



[From the Blog section of the ICUU website (www.icuu.net).]

The Consistory of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church announces with gratitude the establishment of the Szabó Árpád Memorial Fund for PhD Scholarships in Unitarian Theology. Following Bishop Szabó's recent passing to eternity, the intention of the church leadership is to immortalize his legacy by creating a motivational source of support and inspiration in a field that was most dear to him.

Bishop Szabó himself was a recipient of a PhD degree in Unitarian theology, from the Protestant Theological Institute in Kolozsvár; also, he was granted an honorary doctorate from both the Protestant Theological Faculty in Montpellier, France, as well as the Meadville-Lombard Theological School in Chicago, USA. Later, as he became a theological professor, he had led the PhD training of some of his spiritual successors, acting as a model for a theologian of dedicated research and prolific writing.

The creation of the memorial fund aims to provide financial and professional support for those choosing to enter PhD training in Unitarian theology. The fund will act as an endowment, sharing its annual benefits among those enrolled in such a program. The coordination will be done by the executive committee of the Consistory; for inquiries on the fund, please write to: ekt@unitarius.com.

Contributions in US dollars should be sent to the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council, PO Box 88, Bedford, MA 01730-0088. Please make the check payable to UUPCC and note Szabó Árpád Memorial Fund on the memo line. Contributions can also be made in other currencies or using credit cards via PayPal through the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU). To arrange this, please contact Treasurer David Shaw at: treasurer@icuu.net.

[Note that the Hungarian practice is to write the surname first. Rev. Szabó died on 30 September 2010 at the age of 76. He was Bishop of the UCT from 1996 to 2008.]

The Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) has announced that internationally recognized human-rights activist and leader Rev. Dr. William F. Schulz has been named the new UUSC president and chief executive officer. An ordained Unitarian Universalist minister, Schulz was president of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) from 1985 to 1993. He has been a member of the UUSC Board of Trustees, and was executive director of Amnesty International USA for 12 years. He has served as interim president of the UUSC since March.

For those who like to travel, the Neighborhood UU Congregation of Pasadena, California, has organized yet another of its tours – this time, across South India from Chennai (Madras) to Kochi via Pondicherry, Trichy, Madurai and Periyar/Kumarakom over 11–17 March 2011. In their own words: “Experience fabulous temples, meditate in captivating locations, attend a Sunday service at the Unitarian Christian Church in Chennai, visit an ashram in Pondicherry, cruise the backwaters of Kerala, learn about Tanjore painting, enjoy a Kerala cooking demonstration, and watch a Kathakali Dance presentation.” The tour will be led by the NUUC's Rev. Wayne Walder, with the aid of a full-time Indian escort and local guides. See their website (www.nuuc.ca/Journeys/india2011.html) for details and some fantastic pictures of the cities and temples on the itinerary.

Unfortunately, it's probably too late to join this year's Pilgrimage to the Philippines, which will feature a couple of days in Manila and an extensive tour of UUCP congregations around the island of Negros, plus a stay at a beach resort and a whale watching tour. Next year will be even better, though, as the tours will be built around the ICUU Council Meeting in Damaguete City, the first to be held outside of Europe and North America. See the BUILD UU Philippines website for the 2011 details (www.schaibly.com/blog/) and we'll give you better notice, next time.

GODS REST YE, UNITARIANS

Gods rest ye, Unitarians, let nothing you dismay;
Remember there's no evidence there was a Christmas Day;
When Christ was born is just not known, no matter what they say.
O, tidings of reason and fact, reason and fact,
Glad tidings of reason and fact.

Our current Christmas Customs come from Persia and from Greece,
From solstice celebrations of the ancient Middle East.
This whole darn Christmas spiel is just another pagan feast.
O, tidings of reason and fact, reason and fact,
Glad tidings of reason and fact.

There was no star of Bethlehem; there was no angels' song;
There couldn't have been wise men for the trip would take too long.
The stories in the Bible are historically wrong,
O, tidings of reason and fact, reason and fact,
Glad tidings of reason and fact!

Rev. Christopher Raible

[This was first published in Rev. Raible's *Hymns for the Cerebration of Strife* (1990) – a play on the UUA's *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*. Rev. Raible is Minister Emeritus of the UU Congregation of Jamestown, New York, and one of three minister children of Rev. Robert Raible.]



VALENTINE RECORDS

Longest Marriage: Cousins Sir Temulji Bhicaji Nariman and Lady Nariman of India were married when they were both five years old in 1853. Their marriage lasted 86 years until Sir Temulji's death at the age of 91 years, 11 months in 1940.

Youngest Married Couple: An 11-month-old boy was married to three-month-old girl at Aminpur, Bangladesh, in 1986. The marriage had been arranged in order to end a 20-year feud between their families.

Longest Engagement: Octavio Guillen and Adriana Martinez from Mexico finally got married in June 1969, after a 67-year engagement. Both were 82 years old when they wed.

Largest Mass Wedding: Some 21,000 couples, followers of Rev. Sun Myung Moon, were married on the same day in Seoul in 1992. An additional 9800 other couples were married via satellite link-up.

Most Kissing Couples: The greatest number of couples to have kissed in the same place at the same time was 1420, at the Orono campus of the University of Maine on 14 February 1996.

Longest Kiss: Karmit Tzuber and Dror Orpaz kissed for 30 hours and 45 minutes, ending on 05 April 1999, to win a contest held at Rabin Square in Tel Aviv, Israel. For their efforts, the couple won a trip around the world and US \$2500 in cash.

Oldest Bride: At the age of 102, Minnie Munro married Dudley Reid in Point Clare, NSW, on 31 May 1991. The groom was 83.

Oldest Groom: Harry Stevens was 103 years old when he married Thelma Lucas, 84, at their retirement home in Wisconsin on 03 December 1984.

Oldest Divorced Couple: The record combined age of 188 is held by Ida Stern (91) and her husband Simon (97) of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who were divorced in February 1984.

[Collated from various Internet sources, some of which cite the *Guinness Book of World Records*.]

BALLAD OF SPRINGHILL



In the town of Springhill, Nova Scotia,
Down in the dark of the Cumberland Mine,
There's blood on the coal and the miners lie
In the roads that never saw sun nor sky.
[Repeat last line in each verse]



In the town of Springhill, you don't sleep easy,
Often the earth will tremble and roll.
When the earth is restless, miners die –
Bone and blood is the price of coal.

In the town of Springhill, Nova Scotia,
Late in the year of 'fifty-eight,
Day still comes and the sun still shines,
But it's dark as the grave in the Cumberland Mine.

Down at the coal face, miners working,
Rattle of the belt and the cutter's blade.
Rumble of the rock and the walls closed round
The living and the dead men two miles down.

Twelve men lay two miles from the pit-shaft,
Twelve men lay in the dark and sang.
Long hot days in the miners tomb –
It was three feet high and a hundred long.

Three days passed and the lamps gave out;
Our foreman rose on his elbow and said:
"We're out of light and water and bread –
So we'll live on song and hope instead."

Listen for the shouts of the barefaced miners;
Listen through the rubble for a rescue team.
Six hundred feet of coal and slag –
Hope imprisoned in a three-foot seam.

Eight days passed and some were rescued,
Leaving the dead to lie alone.
Through all their lives, they dug their grave –
Two miles of earth for a marking stone.

[Repeat second verse]



Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl

Dedicated to the victims at Pikes River, New Zealand, and their families, this song commemorates an even worse disaster that occurred in Canada in 1958. The Cumberland Mine was one of the deepest in the world at the time and had already suffered a coal-dust explosion in 1956. It was closed after the later event, in which 74 miners lost their lives – known in the industry as a 'bump', the earthquake was caused by insufficient support in the mine's extensive galleries

Margaret ('Peggy') Seeger, half-sister of Pete Seeger, as born in New York City in 1935, and became a famous folksinger and songwriter. She is also well-known in the UK, where she lived for more than thirty years with her singer/songwriter husband, Ewan MacColl. She produced 16 solo albums, the last in 2003, 14 with MacColl, four with her brother, Mike Seeger, and two with the Critics Group, which she and MacColl founded to foster young singers and writers. Curiously, the above song does not appear on any of their albums, though many other artists have recorded it.

FLAMING CHALICE AWARDS

The Perth Unitarians honoured two members with an award through local fellowship by presenting Orders of the Flaming Chalice to Helen and Godfrey Barrett-Lennard on 20 June 2010 in recognition of their commitment to Unitarian Universalist principles and their long service to the Perth congregation, and to two other groups in Carbondale, Illinois, and Waterloo, Ontario. They were founding members of the Perth congregation and have been vitally active since its inauguration in 2000.

Godfrey Barrett-Lennard

Dr Barrett-Lennard is at the forefront of theory in psychotherapy and counselling. He is well known within the psychological community for pushing out boundaries, breaking new ground and extending or building onto understanding already gained, rather than from preserving ideas intact.

Originally from a farming background, Dr Barrett-Lennard went to Northam High School and later on to university in Perth. As he studied, he became deeply interested in Carl Rogers' new therapy centered at the University of Chicago. This interest led him to leave Western Australia in the 1950s to study with Dr. Rogers at the University of Chicago where he received his PhD.

His work is recognised as initiating and contributing, directly and through the work of others, to a major vein of research on the therapeutic relationship. This has led to a related study of many other kinds of interpersonal relationship and group relations.

Dr Barrett-Lennard is both a respected scholar and a practitioner whose work is highly regarded among colleagues in Australia, United Kingdom, Europe and America. His interest focuses on the centrality of relationships in human well-being. He sees people not as separated beings but as living intricately interwoven lives on many levels. His latest book, *Relationship at the Centre*, is his fullest expression of this thought.

His career has seen him involved in teaching, practice, program development, and supervision and consultation with students across the United States and in Canada, Australia and the UK. He continues to publish and has authored many journal articles, book chapters and materials for research along with several books of his own. His contribution to Murdoch University has spanned more than 20 years and continues. In 1984, he became a Visiting Fellow and later an Honorary Fellow in the School of Psychology.

Dr Barrett-Lennard has contributed his skills and experience to the development of new and innovative programs in the School of Psychology, particularly in the counselling sphere. He initiated training here in that field, and his work has helped to inspire and inform Murdoch's new Postgraduate Counselling Program. The Godfrey Barrett-Lennard Counsellor Training Centre was launched in Cottesloe last year. Named in Dr Barrett-Lennard's honour, it provides affordable counselling and real world training for Murdoch postgraduate students.

How I came to Unitarianism – Helen Barrett-Lennard

I have been honoured and thinking about the Order of the Flaming Chalice, and here's a little of my history and how I came to Unitarianism. Having grown as a child, secure and nourished in the Anglican Church, I found myself with considerable doubts in my teenage years. I realise that I was caught in very literal acceptance of the teachings and of the scriptures as taught and could not reconcile those with a developing need for something more. I valued many things in my church community but was aware that my belief was waning.

I became a pharmacist, married, had my first baby, and thought more about christening and its meaning. We went to Chicago and lived in student housing which exposed us to many new and valuable influences, among them some knowledge of Unitarianism through a very good friend who was studying at Meadville Seminary en route to the Unitarian ministry. We moved to the Deep South, Alabama, then to Armidale, NSW, then to Carbondale, Illinois, where there was a thriving Unitarian community with which we linked up happily and then came nearly 17 years in Waterloo, Ontario, and further involvement with a very active Unitarian group. Both of these had lively programmes with children, youth and adults, in fact family groups, and a very good feeling of community and responsibility and searching.

Then came a return to Perth and wilderness, as far as Unitarianism was concerned, so we were very pleased when our Perth group started in late 2000 and we have been members ever since.

ANZUUA



**To all whom these Letters shall come Greeting
The Australia New Zealand Unitarian Universalist Association
on recommendation of the Perth Executive has conferred upon
Godfrey Barrett-Lennard
the Order of the Flaming Chalice
with all the Rights Privileges and Honours thereunto appertaining**

**Given at Drabble House, Nedlands, Western Australia
this 20th day of June, two-thousand ten**

Minister

Chairperson

Secretary

NEWS FROM MEMBER GROUPS

Auckland UC is having a family summer camp over 25–27 March at Huai in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park, where the discussions will focus on outcomes of the Growth Workshop. A Visiting Minister will be with them in February/March.

(The Waitakere Ranges Regional Park is close to Auckland but on the western side of the Peninsula. It has 16,000 hectares of rainforest and coastline, 250 km of hiking tracks, surfing beaches, scenic lookouts and all manner of recreational facilities.)

The Brisbane UU Fellowship has formed one Chalice Circle group and a second will start this year. Their Christmas/Solstice lunch was on 19 December.

UUs of Christchurch have changed their program to services and Chalice Circle discussions on alternate Sundays. They held their annual Summer Solstice party on 18 December.

Melbourne UC had a concert on 19 December, featuring Welsh and Russian choirs.

The Perth Unitarian held a Retreat at the Benedictine Monastery in New Norcia in November – see the next issue for a full report. (New Norcia is the only monastic town in Australia and is named after the Italian home town of the Benedictine order.) They also held a UU Confirmation ceremony for people who had been baptised in other churches and wanted to formalise their new affiliation.

The Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship will have the radical NZ theologian, Prof. Lloyd Geering, as a guest speaker in May.

The Sydney UC had its Christmas Party on 19 December, with many guests from the groups that hire the premises for their meetings and some visitors from overseas.

STREAM OF LIFE PROGRAM

By Daphne Treloar

In 2006, the Reverend Jo Lane took up an appointment with the Unitarian Church in Adelaide. This was a very happy appointment for all parties, as Jo had been a member of the Adelaide Church up to the time when she decided to apply for training in the ministry in the UK and was accepted. It was very much like coming home when she returned to be our minister and she came with a keen desire to introduce new features to our services and to wider activities in our church life. In discussing some of these in our Committee of Management meetings, it was not long before we could see that our building, while very handsome in appearance, was a little limiting in usage and perhaps we could make a few alterations and provide a little more room and flexibility. So it was not long before we were into renovations with the view in mind that we would be able to offer more activities, particularly for people in the community who knew little if anything about Unitarians. Last year, we completed renovations which included enclosing a patio area that linked with two small rooms. With partial removal of walls in these rooms, we created an area which can be one large area or three separate areas if desired and we are pleased with the result.

Our purpose in all this very disruptive process was to provide for a range of activities which we hoped will not only bring new people into the church but also revitalise our own community by being more active in the general community. We have called the overall program 'The Stream Of Life' to symbolise our desire to offer meaningful and enjoyable opportunities for all ages. Part of our Vision Statement states: "We see our church as a community which embraces, nurtures and challenges people from the cradle to the grave. We foster and encourage friendships across the generations both within our congregation and out into the wider community. We value hospitality, friendship and fun and we like to stretch ourselves creatively and permit and encourage each other to take risks throughout our lives."

The past five or six months have been taken up with planning, consulting with people experienced with community programs, advertising a position for a community worker and researching what is already offered by other organisations. We have hired a part-time worker to administer the program and are preparing to begin in earnest in February. There are a number of groups who are already using our facilities. A Grow group, a Yoga class, a group Violin class have been regular users, and a Singles group for more mature-aged people began meeting late last year. This was the suggestion and has been organised by one of the members of the Stream of Life committee, meeting on the first Friday of the month from 5.30 to 7.00 p.m., with the option of dinner together if they wish. Beginning in February, there will be Tuesday morning meetings with a variety of activities available and a speaker or sometimes some entertainment. We hope that some of our seniors who have had a get-together once a month for many years will benefit from this and that residents of some of the Aged Care Complexes in the district will also enjoy an outing.

In March, a weekly support group for mothers who have suffered post-natal depression and a Play Group for their babies will begin. This will be a small group for women referred by local GPs, Health Clinics and other agencies. This is a highly specialised group which has already been operating and is transferring to our facilities. We will also be conducting Parenting Courses, which we have run before and will be resuming. In addition, there will be periodic Meditation courses on weekends, sometimes at Shady Grove, our heritage chapel in the Adelaide Hills, which will be run by a member who is an experienced teacher of meditation.

Our minister has conducted two special weeknight services since we have had the new space. These are designed for a small group, we limit it to twenty-five, and feature readings, rituals and music on a particular theme, such as our first on 'Ebb and Flow'. These have been very well received, particularly by some of our members who feel the need for more spiritual content than we have in some of our Sunday services.

In carrying out this project, we have committed ourselves to a considerable amount of money, which was quite a controversial issue. Our church is very fortunate to have amassed an investment portfolio that has enabled us to afford a full-time minister. Over the years, there have been very generous benefactors who have been responsible for our comfortable situation but the general feeling of members was that we needed to exercise caution, particularly when the unfavourable economic conditions worldwide occurred just after our decision to go ahead. A small committee met and decided that we could fundraise to help with the costs and committed to raise \$10,000 a year for three years. Members arranged a variety of memorable events – cocktail evenings and a quiz night; a member with a boat organised coastal cruises with dinner on Saturday nights throughout the summer; a Cabaret was a winner; and other novel ideas all contributed to the \$30,000

target being raised in one year. That common goal brought everyone together and we hardly noticed that we were spending money, we were having such a great time. The Management Committee has kindly offered to cover the first year's expenses in running the program and we have submitted an application for a \$25,000 government grant which will make that offer unnecessary, if we are successful.

We have a small committee of eight members who are putting their all into making this program a success. We don't have past experience but we believe this is a worthwhile venture – we are passionate about it and we hope the church as a body will embrace it. We are looking forward to the New Year with great enthusiasm and anticipation.

[Daphne is secretary of the Stream of Life sub-committee and previous Secretary of the AUC Committee of Management (2008–10).

EARTHQUAKES AND SHAKEY BELIEFS

By Bill Wallace

Those of us who live in Christchurch have, to a greater or lesser extent, had our properties and bodies shaken up as a result of the 7.1 earthquake and it's hundreds of aftershocks. However it is not just buildings, earth and bodies that have been shaken. A leaflet which my daughter shared with me pointed out that earthquakes can often seriously shake our belief systems. The result for some people is that they experience a wake-up call and rush back to church. For others, the reverse is true. It seems to me that our response depends on what sort of God we believe in, what is our place within the Cosmos, and what is the relationship of God to that Cosmos.

For those who believe that God intervenes in the processes of the Cosmos in order to alter them or to stop them earthquakes and other natural disasters pose an enormous problem. If God is a just God then why do these disasters usually affect the poor much more than the rich? A clue to the answer is to be found in Mathew 5 /45 where Jesus is reported as saying "God makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil." (GNB) In other words God does not interfere with the processes of the Cosmos. These evolving processes exist for the benefit of the Cosmos as a whole and not primarily for the benefit of human beings. This involves us in a reassessment of the place of human beings within the Cosmos. No longer can we believe that the Earth is the centre of the solar system, nor that our solar system is at the centre of the Cosmos. The Cosmos appears to have no centre and we are not even at the centre of our Galaxy. So it really is not much use urging God to hear our prayer if our prayer is asking God to intervene.

How then does a God of love fit into all of this? In the Cosmos we find two apparently opposing forces, that of competition and that of cooperation. The major evolutionary developments have occurred through cooperation. If Oxygen and Hydrogen had not combined there would be no water in the Cosmos and consequently no life in it. If unicellular organisms had not joined together there would be no higher forms of life.

The most developed form of cooperation is human love. To be thoroughly functional, it normally needs to be a mutual activity of giving and receiving. However some people manage to love unconditionally; that is to say, without requiring anything in return. Such people appear to be in touch with a deep well of love within them which can be called the Inner Christ, "that of God" or their true I AM. This well is in fact more like a river which is connected to the loving energy of God, an energy which is present everywhere and knows no limits.

So, if the earthquake has shaken our belief systems, then maybe we can move on to discriminate between the things which we cannot change and the things which we can. Instead of believing in a God who is confined somewhere out there in space, we can believe in a God (mystery) who is everywhere and who is already within us. All that is required of us is that we let go and, in the silence, become aware of the presence of this mystery and our connection with all that is. In this Way of love we then can grow to trust the mystery of the unknown rather than our static so-called "unshakable certainties".

[Bill is a member of the UUs of Christchurch and one of the most prolific hymnodists in New Zealand. A retired Methodist minister, he has had over 200 hymns published around the world.]

ANZUUA NEWS

Planning for the 2011 ANZUUA Conference in Brisbane is well under way and the full program should be ready to appear in the next issue. The dates will be 27–29 August (i.e., Saturday to Monday) and the theme is: ‘Standing on the Side of Justice and Compassion’. The venue is Mercy Place, a former convent in the foothills of Mt. Coot-Tha – for pictures and other information, see: www.mercyplace.org.au.

Derek McCullough of Christchurch has written a budget for the *Under the Southern Cross* anthology of writings and music, envisaged to comprise 100 A5 (folded A4) pages. The major cost will be the services of an editor, which he will advertise for, as copyright fees are expected to be low. Derek is also seeking a grant from the Fund for International Unitarian Universalism, which has been of help in the past. James Hills of Brisbane has canvassed for members of an editorial board for that project and has received acceptances from most member groups.

[The Fund for International Unitarian Universalism is one of four branches of the Veatch Program run by the Shelter Rock congregation in Mahasset, New York. Since 1959, the Program has used the proceeds of a large bequest to issue grants for a vast range of projects in the US and elsewhere. Grantees do not need to be Unitarians, as long as they are non-denominational and their work is consistent with UU principles (e.g., civil rights, social justice, sustainable environments).

Moving into its fifty-first year of operation, the Veatch Program disbursed an amazing \$US 11.3 million in grants to a few hundred organisations during the financial year 2009–10. Anyone interested should visit its webpage: www.uucsr.org/veatch.asp – be sure to see their engaging cartoon-form Financial Report.]

WHAT DO YOU GET IF YOU CROSS...

...a cow with an octopus? – An animal that can milk itself.

...an owl with a goat? – A hootenanny.

...a termite with a praying mantis? – A bug that says Grace before it eats your house.

...a tourist with an elephant? – Something that carries its own trunk.

... an elephant with a kangaroo? – Bloody great holes all over Australia.

...a snake with a Canadian law officer? – A Mountie Python.

...a Unitarian with a Jehovah’s Witness? – Someone who knocks on people’s doors for no apparent reason.

[This is just to mark the end of the International Year of Biodiversity. We’ll try to find something better than lumberjack jokes for the incoming International Year of Forests.]

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hopefully, this issue is out early enough to qualify for its 2010 designation. I would like future issues to go to press in March, June, September and December, though the Spring 2011 issue will need to be ready for the ANZUUA Conference at the end of August.

My thanks to those who contributed such an abundance of material that this issue virtually wrote itself, but for the inevitable hammering of things to fit the available space. But now my ‘cupboard’ is badly depleted and I’m keen to see what other aspiring talent we have in our ranks.

As before, the intention is that *Quest* be made available to the general membership of the ANZUUA groups and my offer stands to provide folded-and-stapled copies to any congregation that request them. Alternately, groups can circulate the electronic files when they are sent and/or refer their members to the ANZUUA website when a new issue is released.