



**“Reverence for life”
Cherishing the diverse life of our planet**



Dear Friends

The world can sometimes seem a bleak place. While we must acknowledge dangerous and harmful developments in geopolitics, when humanity is not at its best, it is important to remember that this is not the whole picture. One of the reasons why we gather on a Sunday is to reinforce our deepest values. We have the opportunity to share our concerns and anxieties, while focussing on what, to us, is of highest worth. We strengthen our resources as we share in worship.

We must not succumb to despair. It is good to “look on the bright side” – not from a place of denial or wishful thinking, but as a reality-based counter to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness that are always lurking in the shadows waiting to seduce us. On Sunday 26 Feb, our service focussed on playfulness in the human spirit; we celebrated the creativity within us all; we expressed gratitude for all that gives us joy in life.

This extract from our gathering prayer by Sara Moores Campbell reminded us that we must retain the innocence of a child in order to feel joy:

Give us the spirit of the child:

The child who trusts, the child who imagines, the child who sings.

Give us a child's eyes, that we may receive the beauty and freshness of this day like a sunrise;

Give us a child's heart, that we may be filled with wonder and delight;

Give us a child's faith, that we may be cured of our cynicism;

Give us the spirit of the child, who is not afraid to need; who is not afraid to love.

The service looked at the way babies learn empathy through playful reciprocal exchanges with the parent; they learn to trust, if their carer's responses are attuned to their needs. I spoke about the joy of spending a day on a collage course – pure, unadulterated fun. I am aware that there is not enough play in my life. John O'Donohue talks of Nature wanting to dream with us, but we are often too busy or preoccupied to play along, thereby cutting ourselves off from vital sources of joy. People shared memories of childhood games during the service, but it was harder to think about how we have fun as adults.

Steven Johnson, in his book *Wonderland: How Play Made the Modern World*, makes the case that significant technological change often arises from people “mucking around with magic, toys, games and other seemingly idle pastimes”. Innovation often emerges when researchers are in a relaxed, cooperative environment, free to bounce ideas off one another. Play is part of our human nature.

I would like to think of our faith as playful: not bound by rigid rules or dogma; receptive to ideas outside of our tradition; comfortable with uncertainty; willing to take risks; reaching out to others and attuning ourselves to their ways of thinking and being, in an effort to find common ground. Playful, too, in our capacity to experience awe, wonder and amazement, like children. Engaging joyfully with the world from a place of hope and gratitude.

Let us celebrate our curiosity, imagination and creativity – our ability to share in joyful celebration, with open hearts and open minds. Let us PLAY!

Blessings from the Minister

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Services March 2017

SUNDAY	Service Leader	FLOWERS	COFFEE
5th	Rev Martin Whitell	Pam Spencer	Pam Spencer
12th	Rev Ashley Hills (Hymn Practice)	Jopie Boeke	Jopie Boeke
19th	Rev Maria Curtis (AGM)	Janet Perkins	Janet Perkins
26th	John Carter	Ann Malloch	Ann Malloch

Events - March 2017

Wednesday

1st

7.00-9.00pm in Church Hall

Green Spirit Meeting led by Maria and exploring the work of the visionary Catholic Priest, theologian and cultural historian, Thomas Berry, (1914-2009). Renowned leader of the eco-spirituality movement in the tradition of Teilhard de Chardin, Berry is famous for proposing the idea that a deep understanding of the evolving universe is a necessary inspiration for our own effective functioning as individuals and as a species.

Sunday

5th

11.30am in Church Hall

MS Cheque Presentation will be made to Justin Burke, Chair of the Horsham, Crawley and district MS Society branch, during the coffee period following Martin Whitell's service. The cheque, for £1956, represents our 2016-17 collection for this nominated charity and the society has strongly expressed its thanks to the church for this handsome sum.

Sunday

12th

12.00-1.00pm in church

Hymn Practice following Ashley's morning service, Liz Hills has kindly agreed to conduct a hymn practice. Please think about any hymns (from green or purple books) you as a congregation member would like to practise and note them on the list currently pinned-up on the notice board in the hall.

Saturday

18th

2.00-5.00pm,
Brighton Church (BN1 1UF)

LDPA AGM reviewing all 28 congregations of the London District and Provincial Assembly, of which we in Horsham are one. Start is 2.00pm, with people invited to arrive for tea and coffee from 1.30pm. Maria is attending with guests and you are invited to support this event and meet other Unitarians from our region. Tea will be provided.

Sunday

19th

12.00 noon in church

Our Church AGM giving an overview of last year's Church activities and progress; inviting Member participation in election of Honorary Officers, Deacons and other Committee Members; nomination of Church charities for 2018, and choice of Anniversary Service Minister for 2019. Members are asked to make every effort to attend as a quorum of at least fifty percent of the current membership roll is required by our Constitution to validate the proceedings.

Saturday

25th

1.00pm United Reformed
Church, London Road

Horsham Interfaith AGM celebrating thirteen years of Horsham Interfaith, followed by a talk by Ian Mowll, Co-ordinator of GreenSpirit UK and concluding with afternoon tea.

Thanks for Refugee Support

As you know, the Church has been supporting the Horsham Refugee Support Group by providing household items and children's books for the Syrian families who have settled in Horsham. Individual Members also generously donated shopping vouchers during the Festive Season. The following is a message of thanks to all HRSRG supporter groups from Joanna Eames who, you will recall, made a presentation to us back in November.

We are so grateful to the community for all they have donated so far. The families were really touched by their 'Christmas present' of vouchers to use in various shops in Horsham and were so thankful. We are not collecting any items at the moment but will let you know as soon as we have a need.

Meanwhile, if you or anyone in your organisation would like to join our team of volunteers to help with informal English conversation classes or befriending, please do get in touch as mentioned in the newsletter.

Joanna Eames
Horsham Refugee Support Group (HRSRG)

A copy of the HRSRG's most recent Newsletter, giving details of activities and continued government lobbying, will be found on the noticeboard in the Church Hall.

Stories from our Congregation

Our 19th February congregational service was enlivened by an extraordinary range of inventive and touching stories by members of the congregation. The church committee felt these were so remarkable that they deserved publication in our newsletter. Here, with introduction, is the first in the series from Janet:

Introduction

This was written in New York by an African-American university student named Leroy Lessane. He was in his final year and I was in my first. It was part of a student publication printed in November 1964 to mark the 1st anniversary of President Kennedy's assassination.



Having chosen the story, I decided to google Leroy. He became an actor in the early 1970s, but by 2004, he was an itinerant artist and homeless, sleeping in a park in Greenwich Village. On Sept 21, 2004, the combined might of the NY Police, Sanitation, and Parks Departments surrounded Leroy and threw all his personal belongings into a dump truck to move him out of the park. Leroy moved on. He died in 2011.

I wasn't prepared for any of this and it has unsettled me: that his life ended up having so many rough edges; that he was seen as a homeless inconvenience whose personal belongings had no worth. Then I realised that not everything of Leroy's was gone. For more than 50 years and travelling over 3000 miles from the city in which it was written, Leroy's story has always been in my possession. I feel now that it's a gift from the Leroy of 1964. Sharing it here is my 'thank you' to him and it's now a gift to all of us.

Janet Perkins

The Fire Worshippers: A Parable by Leroy Lessane



Throughout the summer he had guarded the fire on the beach and kept it burning. People had mocked and jeered, but faithfully he tended the fire with none to help him. In the beginning, all he had to do was reach over and take a log from the pile. Then the pile began to dwindle and he had to leave the fire to gather fuel. The further away he had to go, the greater the chances grew of the fire going out, or being put out forever by those who did not understand the reasons for its

burning. Finally, he made one last trip and decided not to leave the fire again.

The passing months saw the sea stir like a restless sleeper and grow choppy. He noticed nothing but the fire. From time to time he raised his head, as he fed the fire with logs and sticks, hoping to see the approach of another fire worshipper. He never did. The shadow of the sound of the winter wind came closer as he fed the flames with sticks and twigs and bits of his clothing. Still there was no sign of those whom he knew would come.

There was no more autumn as he stood naked and watched his last article of clothing burn. Then he saw the first of the faithful returning. They came, as he had known they would. Some were apologetic; some were belligerent, as if it had been their right to have stayed away so long. The wood they brought built the flame into a fire and they stood around it in a ring, jostling one another for a good position. He who had kept the fire all summer was shunted aside to where he could not see it.

More people came to stand between him and the fire. Now he could only catch glimpses of it shining over the heads and between the legs of those in front of him. Far from the fire, he kept his naked body warm with the memory of spring, while the other worshippers huddled in their robes around the blaze. ‘How truly wonderful to be a fire worshipper,’ one of them said. Came the chorus: ‘Amen.’

Someone wondered whether the fire ought to be made bigger. That would take more wood. They began to talk of wood: ought they to get more wood? How could they get more wood? Where could they get more wood? Who could best get more wood? Yes – they would get more wood.

He who had been faithful in the summer shouted, for he saw the fire flicker while the others whispered only of wood. But he could not be heard.

Sad that they could not hear him when he begged them to forget wood and remember the fire; when he warned them that the fire was going out and if it went out it would be out forever. It was sad that they could not hear him when he shouted that it was fire they worshipped, not wood.

But sadder than these things was that even he could not remember that once, long ago, they had not worshipped fire at all – but warmth and light.