

ORDER OF SERVICE for NEW YEAR 2010

3rd January 2010

PART ONE - Welcome

It is customary at this time to wish one another a "Happy New Year", and the wish is generally accompanied with a smile if not a handshake or hug as well. So, though a hug from here is not practical, "happy New Year" to you all. This is traditionally the time of hope, for new beginnings, for good things to come, it is a time of looking forward, leaving the past behind, it is a time of renewal of starting over. We celebrate this time with bells, and noisy customs, parties and gatherings of friends and family. Loud noise is seen these days as perhaps the irritating edge of the celebrations, especially if like me you tend to just go to bed and let the new year do its own thing, after all (ba humbug) it is only an arbitrary date on an arbitrary calendar, and people all over the world celebrate new year at all sorts of times. But the loud noise is highly significant, in pagan ceremonies noise is used to drive away bad spirits! There are a great many customs for New Year, I well remember my parents, and grand parents, going out of the back door, taking the old year with them and bringing in the new year and a lump of coal at the front door. First footing is often seen as a Scottish custom, and perhaps that is where it came from, there are certainly any number of variations throughout that country, the first footer must be a man, with black hair, or red hair, (women and anyone with any kind of deformity from a hair lip to a limp was viewed as very bad luck), and he would bring with him a gift, of whisky, or a loaf of bread, or coal, or that well known symbol of the messenger, the green bough. The word 'hogmanay' comes from the Norman French and means literally 'gift cake' which is also the name of the triangular oat cake or shortbread which is traditionally eaten with Christmas cheese. There are other customs too, in Wales for instance, people would dress and apple by sticking into it, ears of corn, rosemary (for remembrance), nuts and evergreen leaves, sometimes they would be gilded or decorated with bright ribbons too. This "Calennig" apple would be brought into the house and set up on a stand of holly or rowan twigs. In other places, the old year would be washed out of the house before the new year was let in.; water has an important place in many new year

ceremonies, the first bucket drawn from a well at new year, called the 'cream of the well' was shared around to bring good health. Sometimes water was brought from a ford between a village and a burial ground, both on New Year's Eve, as water of the dead, and then on New Year's morning, as the water of life. Juniper and other pungent herbs were burned to ward off any nasty spirits, Not just houses but barns and byres too received the welcoming treatment. There are many more besides, but as Marian Green in A Calendar of Festivals, writes: "Every one of these symbolic acts or gifts has ancient roots that show that no matter what the season, there are customs to ensure luck, good health, food and drink and the cheer of good company." Here we have come together as a good and welcoming community to share; we shall light our chalice as a welcome to the new year, with a new candle, then we shall sing for noise, and if it wards off bad spirits, well all the better!

CHALICE: CMC

Each time we light our chalice we do so as an act of faith, knowing that its light shines for the freedoms we have gained. Let us now, take the light from the old candle, and with it bring forth new light.

HYMN RED 443 RING OUT WILD BELLS

MEDITATION

For this service I turned again to Carl Seaburg's "Celebrating Christmas"(isbn 0-933840-17-9) , an anthology I suspect most Unitarian worship leaders use every year for it is full of beautiful, thoughtful and though provoking words to carry us over the annual celebrations, Today I have taken a lovely mediation, written by Ernest C Werner, and I invite you to share now in its calmness.

This moment of silence

We have dedicated to listening

In silence.....

It represents stillness;

The stillness of repose, beyond our striving;

The stillness of peace which we seek in God;
Or miss achingly in this torn world;
The stillness of an ultimate peace and
Perhaps a healing
Which we seek beyond our days.

It represents fullness;

For silence is not emptiness but fullness;
The fullness of potentiality before the deed;
The fullness of possibility before the thought;
The fullness of the Divine Life before Creation.

And, at last, our silence represents

All that we cannot say,
The words which we often cannot find
In our praying
Or in our groping thought upon
The ultimate things.

Our silence represents astonishment

At the Miraculous Fact
After which there is nothing to say,

It means receiving, not giving;

Waiting, not doing;
Hoping, not knowing;
Resting, not strift;
And peace.

Silence, too, is a prayer and meditation

Acceptable to God.

After we have thrown into the void our folly and our noise

After we have instructed divinity in the ways of divinity or sought to entice
personal favours,
God waits for us in silence
Which will be filled.

Silence is often the better prayer.

Music.....cdEND WITH SINGING BOWL

Amen.

HYMN ***purple*** **35** ***find a stillness***

PART TWO

So, welcome to the celebration of our New Year. I say "our" new year because we surely know that other cultures, religions, societies, have their own idea of when the new year begins, either because they use a lunar calendar or have some other way of dividing the circle of the year, for example, Islamic New Year began in the last week of December, and our Celtic forbears celebrated the beginning of the year at the beginning of the dark time of the year, rather than the beginning of the light which is closer to our choice of beginning. And then, lets be honest, the months are arranged somewhat arbitrarily, with different lengths to accommodate the approximate time it takes the earth to fully circumnavigate the sun but would it matter if we arranged the number of days in each month differently? Regardless, however, of how we measure it, what we all have in common is that we welcome in our symbolic new year, and at that time, seek to draw a line to denote the beginning of a new cycle, a moment where we start the whole thing off again. It makes sense, for whether we are a gnat or an elephant, a salmon or a kangaroo, a starling or a human, an oak tree or a daisy, all life is cyclical, we are born, we live, we die, regardless of how we measure the time that takes, anything that lives goes through the cycle. Most humans seek to live as long as they can, but for all humanity strives for ever longer life-spans, in truth we extend the cycle just a little, we do not come closer to immortality, nor should we want to. We actually like life the way it is; sure we all want it to be a little longer, a little more comfortable, a little less trying, more health-full, more exciting, or perhaps less exciting! Few of us are totally happy with what we have, nor should we be, for as human beings we are hard-wired to seek out different and better, more efficient ways of doing things, different ways of being, behaving, thinking, feeling, – it is the whole reason we have achieved that which we have achieved. As we wish each other "happy new year" we set a time to draw our line and start over; but do we actually sit down and seriously think about how we

might live out our cycle differently, give a little more, to our self or to others, make more of our cycle, do different things, spice up our cycle of life, make a difference? Probably not, most of us will, in the main, continue just as before, little if anything will change save our bodies which measure our time in aches and wrinkles, and most of those change so slowly we are hardly aware. Perhaps though it is worth taking a little time out, as we find ourselves confined in our warm shelters away from the chill winter weather, to truly consider what is important and make provision for the inevitable changes **we** will undergo for like it or not, the world around us is changing, we are changing, our families are undergoing changes, our small communities are changing, our larger societies are transforming and we have to decide how to address the unassailable fact that these changes will affect us, or end up like so many people do, stranded in their later years, still living in a past that no longer exists. We can stand like King Canute on the shore-line of change, defying the as the waters of change as they lap round our toes, our ankles our knees, our necks, and so on until we are drowning, or we can gather ourselves together, plan, build and well stock a raft or an ark on which we may rise with the waters of change, where from our dry and safe vantage point we may use with care the reserves we have gathered to see us through until we have learned how to be part of the change and to make that change work for and with us.

There being an ice-rink just outside my door of late, I have spent far too long indoors watching television recently and have been thankful for my decision to acquire the minimum Sky box channels for my TV which has enabled me to lose myself for an interesting hour or two watching programmes on the documentary channel, mostly about the history of the Earth and humanity. Contrary to the cold outside, my viewing has brought home to me the reality of global warming, the reasons why some areas, like here, are getting chillier as others grow hotter. What I also learned during some intriguing underwater archeology is that global warming is anything but new and it was most interesting to reflect that some 10 or 11 thousand years ago, our ancient ancestors faced just the same problems that we are about to, and had to learn to deal with them, or die out like the woolly mammoth and sabre toothed tiger. They did not die out, they learned to deal with the huge changes, and

I was fascinated to realise that **we** are the technologically advanced sentient beings we are **because** we faced a time of huge global warming that ended an ice age, with flooding that drowned land five times the size of North America, land never reclaimed! True there were less people then to move back to higher ground, and **we** may be hastening this new phase of global warming with overuse of the earth's resources and our obsession with wrapping everything in plastic, but the global warming phenomenon has happened before just as it is happening again and like our ancestors we will learn to change with it or die out. Whether we believe this is a fait-acomplis or as a result of our over-use of the worlds gifts doesn't actually matter, what matters is that we learn to move with the changes that are coming. Our ancestors had to develop skills, the making of nets, the building of canals, moving inland away from the encroaching seas, moving away from the vast bodies of water building up inland as glaciers melted. They watched great lakes disappear. It is disconcerting to realise that something like a third of Utah used to be a great salt lake – now it is arid desert on which little but speed trials happen. Vast changes that did not wipe out humanity, vast changes that created great changes in humanity; we are not the simple cave-dwellers or hunter-gatherers of the past, we are what they became, and now after then thousand years we have to face many of the problems our ancestors did and a few more of our own. I found it comforting to know that what is happening now is not a new phenomena, that it was nor in spite of but because of such radical changes that humanity developed as it did. I hope we have the courage and the common sense over the next millennia to change for the good = and I am aware that the changes we need to make will start with little things that we do.

HYMN purple 32 Earth was given as a garden

PART THREE

One of the difficulties in making changes to our lives, is that we are mostly rather comfortable just where we are, or at least we know the difficulties of where we are and can deal with them but we are very capable of embracing the changes our lives

demand, regardless of the difficulties, and the scars receive as we struggle to keep up we will bear bravely, we are tougher than we sometimes think. The symbol of the new year is the baby, who takes the place of the old person often depicted with a scythe – death; but as Clarke Dewey Wells writes,(in Celebrating Christmas) “We cannot enter the New Year clean and pure as the shiny babes pictured in illustrations of New Year’s Eve. Neither we nor the world work that way. We enter the new year bearing the encrustations of our time-worn past.” Wells talks of the scars we bear, the marks we bear of the life we have lived. He talks of the way in which soldiers of old would bear their arms to display with pride their old scars, as they prepared to go into the next battle. They wore the signs of heroism and survival bravely. Just as we bear the signs of our own battles bravely as a sign of our strength and determination to carry on. Our scars, be they physical or emotional bear witness to our battles; they also bear witness to our healing. Our scars do not remain open, but slowly close and seal, not as before, for any wound changes us, but whole enough to go on, often with more courage than before. In our healing we are changed, more wary perhaps, more fragile in the area of injury, but often stronger around it. Wells describes it thus: “But if our marked hides testify to our vulnerability and fragility, they also tell of our durability - the transfiguring into the toughest of tissues this baklava of our skin. Amidst the brutalities of life our scars witness to the persistent, countermanding mysteries of healing, re-knitting, re-joining, re-covering, as miraculous as any birth.”

As we enter this brand new year of 2010, we cannot say it will be easy, we cannot say that if we are good then the world will be good to us. What we can say without fear is that this year will hold times of change for all of us, personal changes and changes here in this chapel and its community. Some changes we may hardly notice, if at all, but there may be great changes, and we may gather small scars and maybe some larger scars; these we will bear bravely and wear as a testament to our courage for we will gather strength also from our engagement in change; and the world will change around us, and together we will embrace the new, with hope and courage. Happy New Year to us all. Amen

OFFERTORY

NOTICES

BENEDICTION CMC

In an ever changing world

May we walk together

Giving and receiving strength

And may we have the courage

To sail lightly on the sea of change.

Amen

HYMN ***purple*** ***148 Spirit of Life (1st verse)***

Order of service - organist copy

Sunday 3rd January 2010

WELCOME

PART ONE

CHALICE

HYMN RED 443 RING OUT WILD BELLS

MEDITATION

HYMN purple 35 find a stillness

PART TWO

HYMN purple 32 Earth was given as a garden

PART THREE

HYMN purple 44 Give thanks for life,

OFFERTORY

NOTICES

BENEDICTION

HYMN purple 148 Spirit of Life (1st verse)