

# MU NOW

\*\*\*\*\*



\*\*\*\*\*

## THE MAGAZINE OF THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

ISSUE 45

SUMMER 2015

\*\*\*\*\*

[www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk](http://www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk)

**In this issue:**

From the Editor.....	3
The President's Piece.....	4
MUA District Minister Summer Update .....	7
MUA Executive Committee Key Messages .....	8
MUA Communications: An Idea by Dorothy Haughton .....	10
Sesquicentenary Update .....	12
Asparagus Lunch Service Address by Rev. Don Phillips .....	13
Automatic Enrolment Pension Scheme: the Next Steps by Sandy Ellis, MUA Treasurer .....	20
District Round-up .....	22
Our Vision for the Future.....	29
District Events .....	36
MUA Congregations: Times of Services .....	37
MUA Congregations: Contact Details .....	38
Meditation .....	39

## From the Editor

Welcome to the Summer 2015 issue of *MU Now*.

As I mentioned in the last issue, 2016 is the **Sesquicentenary (150th Anniversary) of the foundation of our District Association**. We are now well into the planning of our celebrations, which include a special commemorative publication, our 150th AGM on 26th March 2016, and later on, an MUA visit to Quarry Bank Mill and Styal Chapel, on Saturday 24th September 2016. See page 12 for details.

Over 50 Unitarians from around the District gathered for the 2015 Asparagus Lunch in May - Rev. Don Phillips' address from the service is on page 13. Elsewhere in the magazine, many visions for the future are shared, starting with MUA President Jane Couper's piece on page 4, and continuing on pages 29 -35.

**Congregational Treasurers:** Sandy Ellis, the MUA Treasurer has some timely advice for you - about the new Automatic Enrolment Pension Scheme on page 20, and about setting up Gift Aid for your congregation on page 32. Both well worth reading!

### **Submissions to *MU Now***

We are particularly looking for stories on local activities, or with a local interest, in addition to articles on the theme. Please send your contributions to me at [revsuewoolley@gmail.com](mailto:revsuewoolley@gmail.com) or to 5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN. THANK YOU! **The theme for the next issue is "Looking Back, Looking Forward"**, and the deadline for submissions will be **Friday 13th November 2015**.

*sue Woolley*

## President's Piece



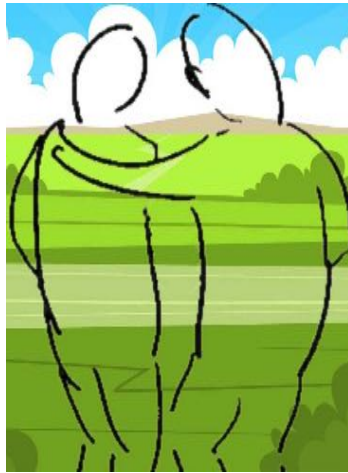
I want to begin by thanking our District Minister for her energetic work amongst us and for encouraging our broader vision. We have enjoyed two excellent opportunities for enrichment. One was the Spring Training day, now some time ago but before I could voice our thanks, and the other was the latest session of the Rites of Passage Foundation Course. If anyone thinks they may like to join in future District events organised by Sue please, please do enrol. We have learned, laughed, shared and got to know each other in an easy, warm setting. It's not a clique: it's open, welcoming, inclusive Unitarianism. What's not to like?

The MUA Executive has begun making its plans for marking the Sesquicentenary of the District, endeavouring to ensure the overall feeling is one of celebration to mark those 150 years. Looking back is good, we gain a valuable perspective as we consider the gains and losses, triumphs and mistakes of so many years. As we review, we see that change and development have always been in the air. Looking back to 1866, across a significant but not unimaginable interval, we can enjoy enumerating enormous shifts in political, social, scientific, cultural and religious life, reflecting that the past can seem a very foreign place indeed. The challenge of change means it's often unwelcome, perplexing and hard to manage. On occasions we have all decided to ignore it, ostrich fashion, pretending it wasn't truly happening. Besides, it's hard to know which change is the one to back, anyone remember buying a Betamax video recorder? But happen it did, and does, and will continue to do so as an inexorable law of life.

At other times we try to be a bit more nuanced in our reaction, recognising that change comes, but hoping (fingers crossed) it won't affect us too adversely. Yet, sooner or later, it catches up with us, perhaps at the very moment we discover that keeping one finger in the hole is not enough to save the dyke or prevent wet toes. Even King Knut knew he'd get wet feet trying to stop the unstoppable. Most religious groups have tended towards a natural conservatism once they have become established and gained sufficient status to fear loss. In the face of life's uncertainty, some faithful souls assert immutability in matters of belief and faith, look at the vocabulary employed: "stronghold", "fortress", "foundation", "firm", "safe", "rock", "absolute", "sure" and "unchanging" all illustrate this confidence. I can see the appeal and comfort provided by the rock of certainty but I can't share it. Other religious groups have been much more questioning. They challenged, root and branch, the physical and spiritual world systems they inherited, being ready "to turn the world upside down" in the vivid words of the New Testament reused by historians of 17th century England. Deep down I admire that courage, courage so raw and visceral that it sometimes threw caution to the wind in order to pursue profound convictions - and here I think of John Biddle of Gloucester.

The question of the moment in our denomination concerns how we decide to see our future - a discussion that will doubtless be informed by the way we analyse our current position. At best, the future can seem positive, full of potential allied with opportunity, which encourages us to give thought to the vision, the hope, we have for it. Less optimistically, the future can also seem negative; its inherent uncertainty reducing us to feeling powerless and fearful. The word vision itself is used in different ways. It can be an ideal mental picture of a desirable state, revelatory, a prophetic dream. Disquietingly, it can also describe delusion or hallucination. Remember there are visions of both heaven and

hell, not all visions are of loveliness. What we anticipate often depends on our current state of mind and confidence. Do we want to see the future as similar to an idealised past, or do we need to free ourselves from elements of it? Do we feel change as somehow discourteous to the beloved past and a betrayal of those who contributed so much in their day, or do we want to be in a line of people continuing their work, daring to look ahead, trying to address the daunting task imaginatively?



Cover of *A vision for our Future*  
(photo [www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk))

If we are wise, we will do well to heed the timely prompt given by the discussion document *A Vision for our Future* and use it to stimulate our thinking, because our future is unquestionably worth thinking about. I have a feeling that “more of the same” is not what we need to be imagining. We should expect to find some of the discussion uncomfortable and challenging but religion has always challenged and no prophet’s intention was to make people comfortable through ease. We may need to go beyond our deep attachment to familiar structures, buildings, and traditions,

perhaps learning to travel light to enable us to be adaptable, versatile, open and ready to respond. What remains certain is the human need to explore by reflection. Questioning all that life and death exposes us to will still need to be accommodated in safe, free-thinking spaces intended to welcome all who want to share in the search. Our distinctive attributes do not go out of fashion but how we present ourselves may have to change. We can rejoice that during the last 150 years some of our once radical beliefs and commitment to social action have passed into commonly accepted views and national life, but there are still battles to be fought, lingering prejudices to be confronted and unpopular causes remaining to be championed. Do, please, honour our past by engaging in our future.

**Jane Couper:** tel: 01386-839458; [janecouper@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:janecouper@hotmail.co.uk)

~~~~~

## **MUA District Minister: Summer Update**

Hello again. Here's a summary of what I've been doing, around the Midland Unitarian Association, and elsewhere.

I am now half-way through my fourth year as **Minister of the Banbury Unitarian Fellowship**. We have two new initiatives: we are supporting Helen and Douglas House, a hospice for children and young adults, and also contributing to the local food bank.

**Leading worship around the Midland Unitarian Association:** My diary for **2016** is now full - I am leading worship somewhere near you practically every Sunday between now and the end of next year (49 services over 46 Sundays in 2016). I look forward to seeing you in your churches and chapels as and when.

Our **Autumn Training Day**, on the topic *Ministering To Our Communities Part One*, will be taking place on Saturday 10th

October at Unitarian New Meeting Church, Birmingham. Led by Diane Rutter of Kingswood, Nicky Jenkins of Chorlton and Katie McKenna of Norwich, I hope it will inspire members of MUA congregations to become involved in your wider communities. See page 36 for full details).

The first two sessions of the **Rites of Passage Foundation Course**, have already taken place at Kingswood, on Weddings and Namings respectively. I am grateful to Revs. Martin Whitell and Lynne Readett for leading them. The third session will be led by Rev. Ant Howe, on Funerals, on 26th September. The final session, when participants will be putting what they have learned into practice, will be taking place in November. More details from me or your congregational Secretary.

In October, I start the second year of the **Encounter** course, which is a three-year training course, leading to a qualification in spiritual direction. I have also started to offer direction sessions, on a one-to-one basis. If anyone is interested, please get in touch.

**Sue Woolley, District Minister, Midland Unitarian Association**

~~~~~

## **MUA Executive Committee Key Messages**

The Key Messages below, from our May meeting have already been published in *Bits & Pieces*. So only those which have not been overtaken by events are published here. Those for the July meeting are published in full, and will also appear in the September *Bits & Pieces*.

### **May 2015:**

1. New Committee Members: we were pleased to welcome Lesley Harris from Evesham and Cressida Pryor from Cheltenham & Gloucester onto the committee.



2. Sesquicentennial Celebrations: the District will be 150 years old in March 2016, and your Committee is starting to think about how we might mark this momentous occasion. Ideas discussed at our meeting include: the production of a special commemorative book; our 150th AGM to include a big display about District and congregations' histories and a banner parade; a social trip in September 2016 to Quarry Bank Mill, and a Summer event at Kingswood. Watch this space! (and see page 12).



Our three new Committee members, from Left to Right: Lesley Harris of Evesham (photo by L. Harris); David Jones of Birmingham (photo by D. Jones); Cressida Pryor of Cheltenham & Gloucester (photo by C. Pryor)

### July 2015:

1. New Committee Member: we were pleased to welcome David Jones from Unitarian New Meeting Church, Birmingham onto the committee.

2. Sesquicentennial Celebrations: following on from May's Key Messages, we are delighted to confirm that a visit to Quarry Bank Mill and Styal Chapel has now been fixed for 24th September 2016, as part of the celebrations. **The Secretary has issued a plea for original worship material to be included in the commemorative publication - please share widely.**

3. Rites of Passage Course: the District is still running the nationally-recognised Rites of Passage course this year. At Kingswood, the session on 26th September (funerals) will be led by Rev. Ant Howe. Anyone wishing to attend this session will need to pay £10. More details on the website, or from Sue Woolley.

4. Autumn Training Day: following on from the successful *The Road Ahead* course in the Spring, the theme for the Autumn Training Day, on Saturday 10th October, at UNM Birmingham, is *Ministering to Our Communities, Part One*. Guest speakers are Diane Rutter from Kingswood, Rev. Nicky Jenkins from Chorlton, and Katie McKenna from Norwich. A flyer has been sent to congregations and lay worship leaders.

Jane Couper: tel: 01386-839458; Sue Woolley: tel: 01604-870746;  
e-mails: janecouper@hotmail.co.uk; revsuewoolley@gmail.com

~~~~~

## MUA Communications: An Idea

A recent Facebook discussion started a thought. A friend of mine runs an Oswestry Network with very little work needed on her part. I wondered if one would be useful in the MUA.

This is how it works. You email me if you have any information you wish to share. This will not be edited so it is very important that you put the most important information into the 'Subject' box. For example: **Upper Pocklington White Elephant and Flower Festival**

Into the message section you put all the other necessary information, if you wish with a poster, and not forgetting to add a name and contact number or email address.

For example: **Upper Pocklington White Elephant and Flower Festival on Saturday 25 May at 2.00pm in the church hall, Pocklington Street, Upper Pocklington. Blah blah blah blah blah**

**Contact Mrs J for more information: 01234 56789**

If you wish to receive the Network News you email me your email address.

If you wish to provide news you email me with your news laid out as above.



(image pixabay.com)

Now the advantage of this system is that it allows the news provider to send out advance warning of anything interesting coming up and then allows the provider the chance to send out a reminder a few days before.

The receivers can quickly spot from the information in the 'Subject' whether it is likely to be of interest.

You could use the system to inform people of special services, regular meetings, special events – a concert, an anniversary, a shared lunch, etc or to gather information.

If you wish to try this out, let me know.

**Dorothy Haughton**    haughton@mallard99.demon.co.uk

## Sesquicentenary Update

As has been reported elsewhere in this issue, the Midland Unitarian Association is 150 years old next March! Here are some of the ways we are planning to celebrate our District's anniversary - **with the help of our member congregations.**

We are going to start our special year with a bang at the **MUA 150th Annual General Meeting, Kidderminster, Saturday 26th March 2016** which we hope will include a big display about District and congregations' histories and a banner parade. We would be grateful if you could start to look out some artefacts and information for the display, and also remember to bring your banner along on the day. Our Guest Speaker will be Kingswood's own minister, Rev. Ant Howe.

Also at the AGM, we will be launching a special commemorative book, The bulk of it is to consist of **original worship material, provided by our many talented writers and poets in the Midlands congregations.** So please send any contributions to me, Sue Woolley, at the address on page 3. We are looking for: Calls to Worship, Chalice Lighting Words, Closing Words / Benedictions, Prayers, Meditations, Poems, Reflections and Hymn Lyrics. They must be your own work, and free of copyright (i.e. not previously published elsewhere). The initial deadline for contributions is **Friday 27th November.** But don't wait till then!

There will also be a **Summer Event at Kingswood** - details to be confirmed, and a **Visit to Quarry Bank Mill and Styal Chapel** has now been fixed for **Saturday 24th September 2016.** Some of the Styal congregation will be there to meet us, and Rev. Alex Bradley has kindly agreed to lead a short worship service for us. Further details will be issued nearer the time.

~~~~~

## **Asparagus Lunch Service Address Oat Street Unitarian Chapel, Evesham, Wednesday 13th May, 2015**

A few years ago Evesham member and professional journalist Maureen Butler wrote an article for the Evesham Unitarians' web site about the long history of the Asparagus Lunch tradition. To quote a part of Maureen's piece:

"It all began back in 1782 when the dissenting ministers gathered at West Bromwich Presbyterian Old Meeting and resolved to meet monthly in order to promote and encourage "an earnest and active interest in all matters reflecting religious liberty... particularly in matters affecting equal rights of all denominations before the law." At that time it was strictly illegal for non-conformist ministers to gather to discuss seemingly 'heretical' ideas but, embellished with delicious seasonal asparagus, the May meetings started to be held at Oat Street Chapel, where gathering under the guise of an asparagus lunch provided the perfect smokescreen." <sup>i</sup>

So that's why we're here today, to celebrate an ancient traditional symbol of religious freedom from the days when neither those of our faith tradition nor many others enjoyed such freedom.

We lit our chalice flame to begin our service today as Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists do the world over when they open their worship. They extinguish the chalice to indicate the closure of worship as we to will do at the end of this service. The chalice flame symbolically encloses our act of worship and distinguishes it from other meetings and conversations.

Visitors to our services and newcomers to Unitarian worship may be forgiven for thinking that the use of the flaming chalice in this way is an ancient tradition, as old as the Asparagus Lunch or perhaps older, with its roots in early Christianity, or Celtic spiritual symbolism of fire but it isn't so.



image: [www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk)

Some Unitarians have linked the chalice and its use in worship to the Hussites, the followers of the 14th and 15th century Czech reformer Jan Hus who began reading the Bible to his congregation in their native language when the Roman Catholic Church demanded that it only be read in Latin. He also offered the communion chalice to the laity when it was reserved for the clergy, the laity only being allowed the bread. Hus refused to repent and paid with his life, and his followers began to use the chalice as a symbol of their movement.

However, this is not why the Unitarians adopted it. You see, the Unitarian flaming chalice is really a very 20th century idea! And it is a symbol not of inward devotion but of outreach and sacrifice in pursuit of freedom and justice.<sup>ii</sup>

Austrian born artist Hans Deutsch lived in Paris in the 1930s. He drew satirical cartoons of Adolf Hitler. When German forces occupied France in 1940, unsurprisingly, he fled, and eventually he reached Lisbon in neutral Portugal. There he met Rev Charles Joy, Executive Director of the American Unitarian Service Committee, a newly formed organisation given the task of assisting Eastern Europeans, Unitarians as well as Jews, in their escape from Nazi persecution. In Lisbon Charles Joy ran a secret network of agents and couriers and Deutsch first brought the flame and the chalice together as the organisation's symbol, a symbol representing the coming together of sacrifice and love. The Unitarian Service Committee (now, of course, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee) remains active in the causes of justice and peace in countries all around the world to this day.<sup>iii</sup>

Later the use of the flaming chalice as a wider Unitarian symbol spread throughout America and eventually worldwide. Unitarian Universalists today see the chalice as symbolic of: the light of reason; the warmth of community and the flame of hope.

I cannot remember a time when the flaming chalice wasn't a prominent feature on all Unitarian letterheads, printed material and signs, and my memories of it go back well into the 1950s. But I don't recall lit chalice candles being used in worship until much later, when again, as I understand it, the idea spread from the United States.

Some Unitarians of the time didn't like it when chalices came to be lit and extinguished at the beginning and ending of worship. In some of our strongly traditional congregations words like 'Papist!' expressing a dislike of the use of candles in any form, might have been heard. Though it did catch on and its use has become pretty universal.

To me, however, the flaming chalice has always remained quite simply a symbol of freedom and justice, both religious and political.

The story of the chalice reminds us that there were Unitarian victims of persecution and intolerance not only in centuries long ago but also in the 20th century. Some of you will have engaged in flower communion services in our congregations and the creation of the flower communion is attributed to Norbert Capek.

Norbert Capek was born in Czechoslovakia in 1870. He grew up in the Roman Catholic Church but became disillusioned and took the path toward the Baptist ministry. He became increasingly liberal and radical, and after attracting unfavourable attention from the German authorities in 1914 he and his family fled to the United States. In America Capek was subjected to two heresy trials initiated by his fellow Baptist ministers but in 1919 he discovered the Unitarian Church. He returned to Prague in 1921 to found a new Unitarian congregation, known as the Liberal Religious Fellowship.

In Prague the worship style was devoid of formality and ritual and some felt that it lacked a sufficient spiritual dimension. So Capek created the Flower Celebration (known to us as the Flower Communion) where each member would bring a flower to be placed in a large central vase. At the close of the service each would take home a different flower, symbolising the uniqueness of each individual and their coming together in communion to share this uniqueness.

Capek chose to remain in Europe during the Second World War and in 1941 he was arrested by the Gestapo on a charge of "listening to foreign broadcasts". Eventually they took him to



Dachau where he died in the gas chamber in 1942.<sup>iv</sup> Unitarian martyrs, within the lifetime of some of us here today; but what of this century, the 21st century?

I was privileged in January last year to attend the biennial conference and ministers' conference of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists in a cold and snowy New York. Understandably the majority of participants in the conference were from the United States and Canada, with others from Transylvania, the UK and Western Europe, but those from Burundi, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, India and the Philippines must on no account be overlooked. They talked so movingly of the vibrancy of their liberal faith communities existing as they do whilst unable to enjoy the levels of religious freedom that we in Europe and North America simply take for granted in the 21st century. We've all heard of life and worship being made very uncomfortable and even dangerous for minority faith groups around the world though we don't often think about such concerns in connection with our own Unitarian communities. But there are such cases, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

There is still work to be done in the furtherance of Civil and Religious Liberty the World Over, but there is also a continuing need for outreach and social action right here on our own home ground.

On Saturday April 25th, a good number of Midland Unitarians were at the New Meeting Church in Birmingham attending a one-day programme, entitled *The Road Ahead*, run by the Rev Rob Gregson and Ann Howell from the Simple Gifts Project, a Unitarian Centre for Social Action that works in community development and support in Bethnal Green, in East London.



The Road Ahead training day at UNM (photo Simple Gifts)

Members of the MUA congregations represented examined their own history and present activity in social witness, as congregations, in their localities. We examined not only ours and our congregations' record and plans regarding social action but also our own individual attitudes to social action of many kinds. Jane Couper, of Evesham, said on the day that "good religion is a balance between 'the self' and 'the other'"; and that to keep things manageable we should "join in with other peoples' pre-existing work".

Individual members of our congregations, of course, do great work in their local communities, and more widely but even as small congregations we have social projects that we support collectively. Small though some of our Unitarian communities may be this only limits the scope of what we might do, it doesn't mean we can do no more and it doesn't legitimise our giving up.

Evesham Unitarians have recently become engaged with the Evesham and District Mental Health Support Services, in Wallace House, literally just across the road here, which in this time of austerity does so much for so many in this town and the surrounding area.

One week after *The Road Ahead* event in Birmingham, and certainly influenced by it, Cheltenham and Gloucester Unitarians were out on the streets of Cheltenham with placards announcing “Unitarians Believe Migrants' Lives Matter”. The kind of activity that few of them had ever engaged in before! Have any of the other congregations represented at the *Road Ahead* event experienced such early results I wonder? I hope so!

Unitarians have always been ones to live out their faith in action, showing respect and acceptance to all and without discrimination – it is, as John Carter said in his ‘Inquiring Words’ “part of our Unitarian DNA”. Being Unitarian can be challenging. May our tradition of social action long continue!

i <http://www.eveshamunitarians.org.uk/article-asparagus.php>

ii [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flaming\\_chalice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flaming_chalice)

iii [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitarian\\_Universalist\\_Service\\_Committee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitarian_Universalist_Service_Committee)

iv [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norbert\\_%C4%8Capek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norbert_%C4%8Capek)

**Rev. Don Phillips**

~~~~~

## **Automatic Enrolment Pension Scheme – the next step**

Those congregations with a Minister, Lay Pastor or any other employees will by now have received a notification from the State Pension Regulator advising them of the “Staging Date” by which they must choose a new suitable private pension scheme and enrol their employee(s) in this, so that they and their employee(s) may start making contributions. Initially this will be 1% each of the “Qualifying Amount” which is all annual earnings between £5,824 and £42,385. Thus if your employee earns £20,000 per year it will be 1% of £20,000 minus £5,824 = £14,176. i.e. £141.76 each per year, starting on your “Staging Date”. (Mine is 1st April, 2016)

There are many qualifying private pension schemes to choose from, but the one which most will chose is NEST – an Organisation set up by the government to make sure that every employer would have access to a high-quality workplace pension scheme for auto enrolment. The NEST website may be found at <https://www.nestpensions.org.uk> and it provides a great deal of help and guidance in setting up your required pension scheme.

The process requires you to enter a host of details including: The Name, Address and details of the “Delegate” whom you nominate to be the Correspondent for the Scheme; The Name, Address and details of the “Employer”; A “User Name” e.g. your email address; a “Password”; a “PIN” No.; and three “Security Questions” e.g. Mother’s Maiden Name, Town where you were born, and Name of your first employer. It then allocates A NEST Scheme No.; a NEST Employer ID No. & a NEST Delegate ID No.

## MU Now Issue 45

You are then invited to specify a “Name” for your Payroll. As you will probably only have one for monthly paid employees, you might use “All Employees”. You will also be invited to specify how you plan to pay the contributions and might choose to specify “Monthly” and “By Direct Debit” so you are then required to enter the details of the Bank from which payment will be made. You are **STRONGLY ADVISED** to make a written note of each of the above pieces of information as you enter them.

The law provides that you **MUST** send a letter to each Employee **BEFORE** entering their joining details into the NEST System and to help you do this, NEST provides a file named “Employer Notices” which explains the process and provides numerous sample letters dealing with the various situations which can arise. Helpfully, it is in Microsoft Word format, which allows you to download it onto your computer, save it and then “Copy and Paste” the letter which applies to you, into a separate Word File for amending to match your own circumstances (Name and Address of Employer, Name and Address of Employee, Date etc.) You will probably choose “Employer Form 1” as applicable to your needs. Then print and post a copy to your employee.

That allows you to Log In to NEST and enter the Employee’s details: e.g. Title, Full Name, Address, Job Title, National Insurance No. etc. etc. NEST will then write to the Employee allocating them an NEST Employee ID No.

At this stage, you are not required to specify earnings of your Employee(s) as at 1st April, 2016. The NEST Online System is well-designed with lots of help screens. I found one or two glitches but these were easily overcome. For example, the “Address Lookup” where you enter the first line of the address, then the Postcode and invite it to look up the address didn’t work on my computer. but it is easy to choose the “Manual Entry” option and just key in the details.

The whole process sometimes seems daunting but if you persevere, it all comes out right. But above all, just because your deductions are not due to start until April, 2016. DO NOT LEAVE SETTING THIS UP UNTIL TO THE LAST THING – DO IT NOW!

**Sandy Ellis, MUA Treasurer**

~~~~~

## **District Round-up**

### **UNM Birmingham**

In the last six months UNM has undergone some changes, greatly influenced by the changing demographics of the congregation and the influence of its international visitors. We are privileged to have people attending from USA, Amsterdam, Germany / Russia, and they have brought a new vibrancy to our worship. We have also recently began to include solo singing pieces in a monthly service. The first solo was when David Jones, the Chairperson, sang a beautiful Palestinian story in a service. Since then, in our worship service we have had some popular music sung by Marcia Sparkes, accompanied by Yannis on guitar, newcomers to our community. We hope this will continue with a mixture of music genres including gospel too.

With the growing situation of migrants, UNM looked to see how we could respond and fulfil our social responsibility to our locality. How we could communicate our empathy and welcome the stranger. This developed another project well on the way at UNM, a project-partnership with the Restore Charity, which works to befriend refugees and asylum seekers. Together, we have held three parent-toddler groups, welcoming refugees through our doors, offering friendship, a listening ear, and food. They have been fun occasions, but also heartbreaking to hear their stories as

we reach out to build friendships. This project will continue again in September on a bi-weekly basis.

This new quarter brings a mixture of new projects. A workshop involving photographs and discovering our spirituality. Also a walking group, open to the public, to explore our local area, looking at some photographs of 100 years ago, and visiting some of our landmarks. This group will meet monthly (while the weather is good), and together we will make friends as we walk the path where many Unitarians have trod before.

We look forward to the Winter season with new and old events, getting together with old friends and making new ones. And yes, we will be open on Christmas morning for a short service followed by refreshments. Do join us if you can.

**Rev. Winnie Gordon**

~~~~~

### **Dudley Diary**

As a general rule July is Dudley's 'Reverend' month, when both Sue Woolley and Penny Johnson take services. This year, however, it was different: because of other commitments, Rev. Penny Johnson asked to change to 23rd June, when she would be leading the service at Coseley in the morning. As it was not practicable to open the Dudley Church, we joined Coseley, where we were joined by Gavin Lloyd (Oxford).

Penny's service was thoughtful, thought-provoking yet gentle, on the theme of "Let us speak the truth in love". Although there were (sadly) no children present, we did not miss out, but were introduced to Miranda, the youngest member of the Women's League, a very shy glove puppet, guaranteed to bring a smile even to the rather older congregation! With Helen (Emery) at the

organ, Penny's husband Ken, and Gavin we certainly made a 'joyful noise unto the Lord'.

At Dudley, we were glad to welcome Rev. Sue Woolley to lead the Oldbury Rose Service, held on the first Sunday in July. The Church was bedecked with flowers, thanks to Pam Rose and family and there were rose corsages for the ladies and carnation button-holes for the men. Sue's carefully chosen readings, from Rabindranath Tagore and Ralph Waldo Emerson amongst others, kept well to the mood of summer warmth and light. Her choice of hymns, with organ accompaniment by David Mearman, echoed this theme. A really delightful afternoon that could not help but lift our spirits.

Round the tea-table, at the end of the Service, Pam reminded me that the original Oldbury Rose Service was mostly for the children (all were invited, but grown-ups could come if they don't get excited). The children –all in their Sunday best and clutching their posies - were lined up outside the Church, in two lines lead by the Rose Queen from last year and the new Rose Queen. At a signal from the Church porch, they would enter and march round twice, the second time leaving their posies on the steps leading to the altar, then going quietly (!) to their places. All, that is, but the Queens, who had places of honour behind the altar rail. After a short service of hymns and readings, the children would line up again, and again march round the church to the hymn "Forward through the ages", this time picking up their posies and exiting for the important event of being photographed.

Two ex- Rose Queens, now departed this life, worshipped at Dudley Church until a few years ago - Nancy Wilkinson and Vera Stevens. I am sure that many people of my age have happy memories of similar festivals.

**Barbara Russell BCGUC**



## **Kidderminster New Meeting House: Two New Appointments**

We are delighted to announce that Rev Winnie Gordon is to become Minister of Kidderminster New Meeting House. She will commence her role here in early October.

Winnie of course needs little introduction. She is well known across the District for her excellent and ongoing work as Minister at Unitarian New Meeting Church, Birmingham, and we are looking forward to closer links between our two congregations as we share in the mutual benefits of her ministry. She is also well known by those congregations she has served in both Shrewsbury and Kingswood, and of course for her work nationally with the GA.

We have no doubt that she will bring much love and many talents with her to ministry at New Meeting House, benefiting both present and future members and congregation as well as the local community we aim to serve.

We are also delighted to announce that we have also appointed Aleks Zgliniska as Community Facilitator at New Meeting House. She starts her role with us in mid-August. Aleks has a wealth of experience of working in Unitarian and young person related environments. She is, for example, chair of the national Young Adult Network (BUYAN), and like Winnie, a member of the forward thinking 2020 Group established by GA to help grow Unitarianism in Great Britain.

Aleks has been a member at New Meeting for just under two years, and is brimming with ideas about how to extend our community links, serve young families, and provide activities that will attract more people. These initiatives will provide the focus

for her role with us, and she will be working closely with Winnie to this end.



Rev. Winnie Gordon  
(photo from UNM Newsletter)



Ms. Aleks Zglinska  
(photo by A. Zglinska)

We are very pleased indeed to be able to make these two exciting appointments. Everyone at New Meeting wants Unitarianism to flourish in Kidderminster and beyond. We are very confident that both Winnie and Aleks will inspire us to meet this challenge. We know too that they will be able to rely upon the fullest support of the congregation.

We all realise what a fantastic opportunity this is to make to make significant strides forward, and we shall all be doing our utmost together with Winnie and Aleks, to ensure that this happens.

**Graham Williams, President, Kidderminster New Meeting House.**

~~~~~

## **Cabinet of Curiosities at Shrewsbury Unitarian Church**

As part of the national Heritage Open Weekend, 10<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> September, SUC is hosting a display by local artist group '*re-collect*'. The Cabinet is a touring artwork made from recycled furniture, with numerous drawers and secret corners which visitors are encouraged to explore. Inspired by the collections of local lad Charles Darwin (who worshipped in the church as a child), the many objects included will be selected by the artists in response to the church setting.



Members of Shrewsbury Unitarians examining the Cabinet  
(photo Alison Patrick)

At the same time, the artists have invited members of the congregation to create their own display of 'Curiosity Boxes' with objects of significance to them. The Church will be open from 10 to 4 o'clock on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and from 2 to 4 on Sunday.

**Belinda Cousens**

## **Weddings at Warwick**

Recently, at Warwick Unitarian Chapel, in light of the change in the law, we registered the building for same-sex marriages. To our surprise we were the first church in Warwickshire to register. Consequently we drew some attention from the media and an article appeared about us in the local press. Following on from that the local BBC radio station contacted us to ask if we could provide a willing participant in a radio interview at the unearthly hour of 7.40am on the following Sunday morning. We looked around for a morning person and the obvious choice was our valiant Chairman: Malcolm Burns. Malcolm did a delightful interview (most of us listened to a recording later in the day) and gave interesting, thoughtful, and skilful answers, explaining about our lovely venue which is suitable for all sorts of weddings. We are expecting a rush from early risers, and in fact Ant Howe performed the first same sex marriage at Warwick on Saturday 25th July which was a very joyful occasion.

**Elaine Nomura**



This beautiful rainbow chalice was designed by Catherine Coyne, of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester. Used with permission.

**Editor's Note: MUA Chapels registered as at 4th August 2015:**  
Birmingham, Cheltenham & Gloucester, Warwick.

**Chapels in process of registration:** Evesham, Kidderminster,  
Kingswood, and Shrewsbury.

~~~~~

## **A Vision for Our Future**

**Rudolph Steiner**

One of my heroes is Rudolf Steiner who was born in 1861 and died in 1925. He was one of the most forward looking of philosophers and, in fact, as he looked to the future his teaching and philosophy look ahead to the development of the human race hundreds of years in the future.



Rudolph Steiner (image: wikimedia commons)

He grew up in Austria, his father was a station-master and his mother a maid. He was a genius.

Rudolf Steiner was a mystic, philosopher, social reformer, architect, and educator, amongst many other things. His first job after dropping out of university was editing Goethe's books on the natural world. His own first book was called *The Philosophy of Freedom*, and Steiner always considered this one of his most important books, as it promotes freedom in the sense of all people being capable of actions motivated solely by love (this is why I believe he was hundreds of years ahead of his time!), and that true freedom is the activity of acting in full consciousness, which includes overcoming influences of both heredity and environment.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Steiner founded a spiritual movement: "Anthroposophy" with roots in Theosophy.

He developed a movement art called "Eurythmy", sometimes called "visible speech and song". He wrote four plays called the Mystery plays about spiritual development, which I find very difficult to understand. Two were performed in London and Stroud earlier this year.

Steiner also worked on colour, art, and architecture; designing and building a cultural centre at Dornach Switzerland called the Goetheanum, in 1913. It is still very active today.

He was passionate about education, and established a system of education called the Waldorf Schools. He also established a system of care and education for the learning disabled called the Camphill Movement.

Steiner created a system of natural medicines called Waleda, and which are available today in your health food shop. He designed

a system of agriculture (at the request of farmers of his day) called Biodynamic Agriculture which is based on natural fertilisers, instead of chemicals.

He also established a system of Christian worship called the Christian Community. The form of worship is very beautiful, but most Unitarians would find it too formal and structured. Steiner said “Its work is based on a free relationship to Christ, without dogma. Its priesthood is open to both men and women.” (Sounds familiar?!)

Steiner’s published lectures are about six thousand, and his books approximately forty.

Of course the Unitarians had to invite him to England, and in 1922 Manchester College Oxford asked Rudolf Steiner to come to England to lecture on his philosophy of education. Steiner had visited London 20 years before to lecture to the Theosophists, and he was to visit again in 1924, to give yet more lectures, in Torquay and London just six months before he died. His 1922 Oxford lectures led to the founding of the first Waldorf Schools in Britain. There are now more than a thousand Waldorf schools worldwide. These schools exercise his basic philosophy of education: “Our highest endeavor must be to develop free human beings who are able of themselves to impart purpose and direction to their lives. The need for imagination, a sense of truth, and a feeling of responsibility are the three forces which are the very nerve of education.”

Rudolf Steiner also said: “If we do not believe within ourselves this deeply rooted feeling that there is something higher than ourselves, we shall never find the strength to evolve into something higher.” What an extraordinary genius he was.

**Elaine Nomura, Banbury and Warwick**

## **Are you paying *your* share of running your church?**

This article was printed in an earlier edition of *MU Now*, but I make no apology for submitting it again for inclusion in an edition with the theme of *A vision for our future* because without a proper level of contributions, we won't *have* a future! We Unitarians seem to hate talking about money – it seems to make us feel embarrassed. We are quite happy to pay £800 per year for membership of the golf club, or £250 to the Cricket Club, or £6.50 for a cinema ticket, but most of us seem to think we are being generous if we put a £5 note in the collection on a Sunday – and that is if we are *there* on that particular Sunday! And let's face it, many of us put in a £1 coin and think that's enough.

Well it isn't! Even the smallest church costs £350 per week to run and that's only because – thanks to the generosity of our forebears, the building itself is provided free! Of course we incur the cost of maintaining it, but *they* paid to build it. There's a good case for placing a notice at the entrance to our churches saying "This church costs £350 per week to run" – or whatever the annual accounts show the cost to be. If you then do a quick sum and divide that by the number attending, you'll usually get quite a shock.

So what *do* we pay? This varies widely and none of us would ever wish anyone to cease attending purely because they have to live on a modest income. Nor is it that simple: some members devote a vast amount of hours each year to helping the church run smoothly, without charging a penny for their time. Others run fund-raising social events which not only give pleasure to those attending but generate hundreds of pounds each year for the church. So no treasurer would dare to put up a notice at each year end showing the contribution paid by each member – it's deemed to be a private matter and up to the conscience of each member and would in any event show an unfair picture of individual



contributions. Nonetheless, the treasurer has to pay the bills despite the fact that many contributions are too low.

The Unitarian Universalist Association's churches in America have a much higher rate of contributions than ours even allowing for the average national income being a third higher. And Mormons are a treasurer's dream – they pay 10% of their gross income every year – the traditional tithe! But even if we took just 2% of our income as a guideline, that would show £460 per year in the West Midlands. It is also interesting to see how one of our Southern congregations tackled the problem: they encouraged their members to place a standing order with their banks so that the church received a regular income each month throughout the year. The monthly amounts paid vary but average £35 per member or £420 per year. This not only greatly simplifies the task of the treasurer, who receives a regular monthly income to pay the bills, it also makes it easy for an extra 25% to be claimed in Gift Aid Tax. An explanation of how this works is given below.

### **How Gift Aid works**

The Gift Aid scheme is for gifts of money by individuals who pay UK tax. Gift Aid donations are regarded as having basic rate tax deducted by the donor. Charities take your donation - which is money you've already paid tax on - and reclaim the basic rate tax from HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) on its 'gross' equivalent - the amount before basic rate tax was deducted. Basic rate tax is 20 per cent, so this means that if you give £10 using Gift Aid, it's worth £12.50 to the charity.

### **How to make a donation using Gift Aid**

In order to make a Gift Aid donation you'll need to make a Gift Aid declaration. The charity will normally ask you to complete a simple form - one form can cover every gift made to the same charity for whatever period you choose, and can cover gifts you

have already made and/or gifts you may make in the future. A Gift Aid declaration must include: your full name; your home address; the name of the charity; details of your donation; and it should say that it's a Gift Aid donation.

### **Making sure you've paid enough tax to use Gift Aid**

You can use Gift Aid if the amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax you've paid for the tax year in which you make your donation is at least equal to the amount of basic rate tax the charity and any other charities you donate to will reclaim on your gift. The tax year runs from 6<sup>th</sup> April one year to 5<sup>th</sup> April the next. If you make a number of Gift Aid donations, you will need to add up the total tax you've paid and make sure that you don't make Gift Aid donations in excess of four times this amount. You don't necessarily have to be working to be paying tax. Apart from tax on income from a job or self-employment, the tax you've paid could include: tax deducted at source from savings interest; tax on State Pension and/or other pensions; tax on investment or rental income (including tax credits on UK dividends); Capital Gains Tax on gains. Other taxes such as VAT and Council tax do not qualify, nor does any non-UK tax.

### **How to check if you've paid enough tax**

To work out if you've paid enough tax to cover your donations, divide the donation value by four. For example, if you give £100 in a particular tax year you will need to have paid £25 tax over that period. ( $£100/4 = £25$ ). (Note that this calculation is based on the basic rate tax of 20 per cent). If you don't think you've paid enough tax this year, you may be able to carry back your donation to the previous tax year.

## **Collections for the benefit of the church**

If the church is recognised as a charity by HMRC, Gift Aid can be claimed on all money collected for the benefit of the church. For one-off donations, your church may choose to pre-print the Gift Aid declaration on an envelope for completion by the donor. In order to make a repayment claim your church must obtain a Gift Aid declaration from the donor. Linking *cash* donations to Gift Aid declarations has been difficult in the past – but is made much easier by the new rules which took effect from April 2013.



(image: flickr.com)

## **The revised scheme which started on 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2013**

In April 2013, the government introduced a scheme that allows charities to claim Gift Aid on up to £5,000 of small donations without the need for Gift Aid declarations. In other words, the weekly collection moneys will now qualify for Gift Aid even 'though the names of the givers aren't known. This breaking of the link between the donor and the tax relief abolishes the need for an 'envelope scheme' but means that Gift Aid on such donations could be seen not as a tax relief but as a grant or government expenditure. Although this also means it could be at the whim of the government to withdraw this concession in the future, in the meantime we should take maximum advantage from it.

**Sandy Ellis, MUA Treasurer**

## **Autumn Training Day: Ministering to Our Communities (Part One)**

**Diane Rutter, Nicky Jenkins, and Kate McKenna** will be leading this exciting workshop, in which participants will be able to explore how engaging with the community outside our doors can feed the spirit of Unitarianism within ourselves, within our congregation, and without, into our locality and our communities. Each speaker will share their unique perspectives:

- **Diane Rutter** (village) on how getting involved in the area you live in and grow friends that visit and participate in the life of the church.
- **Nicky Jenkins** (suburban) on getting out and about in a suburban community. The experience of Café Church.
- **Kate McKenna** (social action / justice) on how we can get involved with e.g. LGBT issues, and invite them to join us.

**When:** Saturday 10th October 2015

**Where:** Unitarian New Meeting Church, Ryland St, Birmingham  
B16 8BL

**Times:** 10.00 am - 4.15 pm (coffee / tea from 9.30 am)

**Cost:** Free to MUA participants; £10 for those outside the District

## **MUA Annual Lunch**

**When:** Saturday 31st October 2015

**Where:** Kingswood Meeting House, Packhorse Lane,  
Hollywood, Worcs B47 5DQ

**Times:** 11.00 for 11.30 (lunch at 1.00)

**Guest Speaker:** Rev. Winnie Gordon

**A letter will be going out to Congregational Secretaries shortly**

## MUA Congregations: Times of Services

### Every Sunday:

|                         |                                   |          |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Birmingham              | Unitarian New Meeting Church      | 11.00 am |
| Cheltenham & Gloucester | Bayshill Unitarian Church         | 11.00 am |
| Evesham                 | Oat Street Chapel                 | 11.00 am |
| Kidderminster           | New Meeting House                 | 11.00 am |
| Kingswood               | Meeting House                     | 11.00 am |
| Oxford                  | Manchester College Chapel Society | 11.00 am |
| Shrewsbury              | Unitarian Church                  | 10.30 am |
| Stourbridge             | Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel   | 11.00 am |
| Warwick                 | High Street Chapel                | 4.30 pm  |

### First Sunday of the Month:

|               |                   |          |
|---------------|-------------------|----------|
| Coseley       | Old Meeting House | 11.00 am |
| Dudley        | Old Meeting House | 3.00 pm  |
| Oldbury       | at Dudley         | 3.00 pm  |
| Wolverhampton | at Dudley         | 3.00 pm  |

### Second Sunday of the Month:

|             |                                   |          |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Coventry    | Gt Meeting House Unitarian Church | 11 am    |
| Cradley     | Park Lane Unitarian Chapel        | 6.30 pm  |
| Northampton | Unitarians                        | 10.30 am |

### Third Sunday of the Month:

|                          |                   |          |
|--------------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Coseley                  | Old Meeting House | 11.00 am |
| Dudley                   | Old Meeting House | 3.00 pm  |
| Herefordshire Unitarians |                   | 3.00 pm  |
| Oldbury                  | at Dudley         | 3.00 pm  |
| Wolverhampton            | at Dudley         | 3.00 pm  |

### Fourth Sunday of the Month:

|             |                                   |          |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Coventry    | Gt Meeting House Unitarian Church | 11 am    |
| Cradley     | Park Lane Unitarian Chapel        | 6.30 pm  |
| Northampton | Unitarians                        | 10.30 am |

### Last Sunday of the Month:

|         |                      |          |
|---------|----------------------|----------|
| Banbury | Unitarian Fellowship | 11.00 am |
|---------|----------------------|----------|

## MUA Congregations: Contact Details

| Name                    | Contact         | Details                                           |
|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Banbury                 | Elaine Nomura   | 01926 611964<br>emtnomura@aol.com                 |
| Birmingham              | Angela Maher    | amaher@theiet.org                                 |
| Cheltenham & Gloucester | Cressida Pryor  | 01242 604120<br>zenziallink@hotmail.com           |
| Coseley                 | Helen Emery     | 01902 492089<br>helenjemery@fsmail.net            |
| Coventry                | David Woodward  | 024 7659 1918<br>david.woodward377@btinternet.com |
| Cradley                 | Sheila Powell   | 01384 838729                                      |
| Dudley                  | Barbara Russell | 01902 650168<br>barbara-russell@blueyonder.co.uk  |
| Evesham                 | Lesley Harris   | 01242 573927<br>agonoid@gmail.com                 |
| Herefordshire           | Isabel Pebody   | 01989 565804<br>isabel@pebody.net                 |
| Kidderminster           | Kate Allan      | 01527 570272<br>kate@gandkallan.plus.com          |
| Kingswood               | Nina Caddick    | 0121 430 8421<br>ninacaddick@hotmail.com          |
| Northampton             | Jon Small       | 01604 627885<br>jonasmall@hotmail.co.uk           |
| Oldbury                 | Pamela Rose     | 0121 422 0311<br>georgejrose@hotmail.co.uk        |

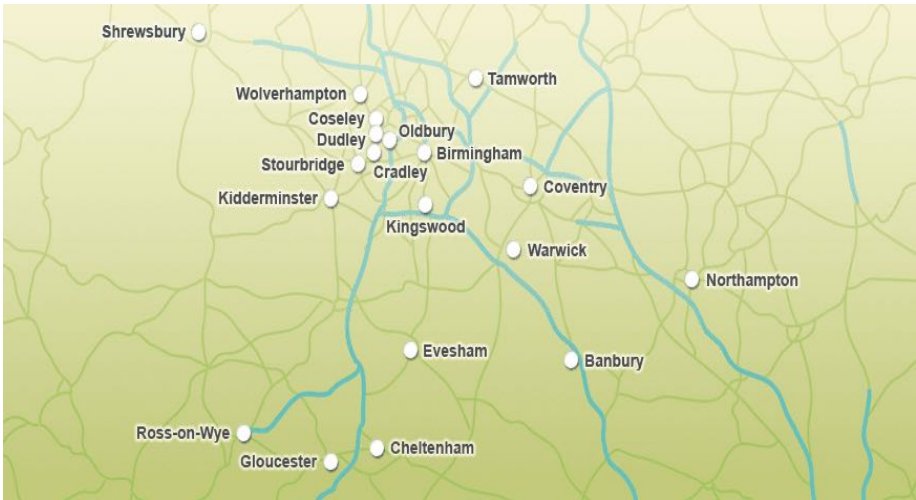
| <b>Name</b>   | <b>Contact</b>     | <b>Details</b>                                       |
|---------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Shrewsbury    | Belinda<br>Cousens | 01743 718237<br>belindacousens@btinternet.com        |
| Stourbridge   | David<br>Mearman   | 01384 376478<br>davidmearman<br>@hotmail.com         |
| Tamworth      | Sandy Ellis        | 01905 391607<br>sandyellis@tiscali.co.uk             |
| Warwick       | Elaine<br>Nomura   | 01926 611964<br>emtnomura@aol.com                    |
| Wolverhampton | Barbara<br>Russell | 01902 650168<br>barbara-russell<br>@blueyonder.co.uk |

### **The Purpose of Religion by Cliff Reed (adapted)**

The purpose of religion is  
to create loving community;  
to foster relationships of mutual caring and respect;  
to nurture the human spirit;  
and to comfort, challenge, and inspire us, as the need arises.

The purpose of religion is  
to seek and to find a moral compass for the soul;  
to make responsible use of the mind's powers;  
to help us become good stewards of God's green earth;  
and to be humble explorers of the universe.

The purpose of religion is  
to celebrate life in its fullness;  
to follow in the footsteps of those who have taught and live the  
better way for humankind;  
and to uphold the universal values that make for peace, justice,  
and happiness the world over.



**The Winter 2015 issue will be published in December**

**Please may we have your contributions on local matters,  
& on the theme of "Looking Back, Looking Forward"**

**by Friday 13th November 2015**

*Thank you!*