

# MU NOW

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## THE MAGAZINE OF THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

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[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 Winter Update .....	7
MUA Executive Committee Key Messages .....	8
Sesquicentenary Update .....	9
MUA Annual Lunch October 2015 .....	10
Ministering to Our Communities Part One .....	12
Spring Training Day 2016 .....	16
Rites of Passage Course: Report .....	16
District Round-up .....	18
Seeker Seeking Seekers .....	30
District Events .....	32
MUA Congregations: Times of Services .....	33
MUA Congregations: Contact Details .....	34
Meditation .....	35

## From the Editor

Welcome to the Winter 2015/16 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 9 for more details.

We particularly hope to see at least one participant from EVERY MUA church or chapel or fellowship at the 150th Annual General Meeting, which is being held this year at Kidderminster. We're planning to hold a banner parade at the beginning of the meeting, so if your congregation has a banner, please bring it along! See page 32 for more details.

Although nobody submitted anything specifically on our theme 'Looking Backwards, Looking Forwards', many of the reports of past District and congregational events are looking backward over 2015, and some are looking forward to 2016.

### 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 "Appreciating What We Have"**, and the deadline for submissions will be **Friday 6th May**.

*Sue Woolley*

## President's Piece



This edition's theme, "Looking Back, Looking Forward" is certainly appropriate for MU Now's first edition of the year. By now, with our individual reviews of last year well past, some of us may have fallen away from our resolutions to re-calibrate our lives. My respect goes out to those more focused souls who are still persisting in their adoption of new priorities.

I guess one of the attributes of being human is the ability to transfer our attentions, at will, from present to past or future. Often I hear it said that only the present really exists but, of course, in a moment, it's no longer the present. I'm not convinced that it's helpful to have the tripartite separation too firmly in mind. We exist in a state of fluidity, our present is shaped by our past and that present affects our future. We experience the present as if it were running away from us, always on the move and impossible to hold except in a series of frames before it joins everything past. Those who can live gracefully and harmoniously moving between all three seem to me to be the most balanced.

Looking back allows us to consider, reflecting as we remember. "Remember" is a word I like, its constituent parts make us realise how important it is to us. We literally re-member, we put back together the separate parts and make the memory as whole as we can. Doing this gives the opportunity to re-evaluate, to understand better and perhaps, by doing so, become a little wiser. It may be the historian in me that sees it this way and I'm not claiming we necessarily learn from the past, or that we all agree

what the learning might be, but its availability makes this a possibility. Indeed, I recognise that we have trouble agreeing on what actually happened before we even attempt an interpretation or assessment of it. People look back, often finding themselves astonished at how the years have quietly stacked up. Even children look back; there is something lovely when a young child solemnly utters the phrase “When I was little. . .” Memory starts early and we soon develop that conscious skill of selective recall which we deploy when it suits us. In other words, we re-member and then at once redact, meaning the past is often an unreliable guide, perhaps rather less than the repository of all truth and light, because we create it in our own way. The importance of the past is made clear to us when we are imaginatively saddened for those who suffer from dementia, an affliction that robs them selectively, leaving only the distant past intact, often remarkably so. Some sufferers may reach a settled happy state in their altered world, but for those whose journey does not reach this point there can be repeated sorrow. My aunt, after her husband’s death, endlessly asked where he was and it struck me that she experienced the shock of widowhood many times a day.

Looking back is an activity not a home. It offers a mix of happiness and sorrow, much like that we will experience in time forward. Anticipation brings its own worries and hopes. Looking forward is a long game, duration unknown, perhaps travelled cautiously, step by step, yet at other times in leaps and bounds of confidence and enthusiasm.

This year the MUA will be looking back with gratitude to those Unitarians who, 150 years ago, were busy looking forward. In 1866 Unitarians in the Midlands already had a substantial, though sometimes precarious and often tumultuous, history. It had developed from the first half of the 17th century onward, and was studded with hard won jewels of courage, tenacity, conviction,

free thinking, social conscience and political leadership. And now, numerically weaker than in the glory days, we are still here to make our contributions to contemporary life.

Working out how we can make that personal contribution is often easier done with others, and this District has a commitment to providing training and opportunities to do this. The Rev. Sue Woolley is skilled in creating just the right sort of event. The Autumn Training Day, Part One of Ministering to Our Communities, provided us with actual examples where this is happening. These attempts, related with humour and honesty, were sometimes successful, sometimes stressful, but always worked at with the perseverance of those who have a long view. Please come to part two, it’s guaranteed to be a very good, useful and enjoyable use of your Saturday. In this connection, I mention the recent Rites of Passage course. It concluded with a rather nervous cohort of students facing the moment of their assessment. We had grown to know, like and feel easy with each other, but this last session began with an atmosphere reminiscent of a dentist’s waiting room. Fear unfounded! The assessment was kindly and helpful on all sides, and we were soon at ease once again –and just a little bit pleased with ourselves.

The very exciting news is, of course, that Northampton Unitarians have a new building much more suited to their needs and aspirations. I can’t think of a better way to end this piece than with celebrating the vision and work of all who took part in the venture and to know that Northampton is “Looking Forward”. May they be typical of us all!

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

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## MUA District Minister: Winter Update

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

I am now starting my fifth year as **Minister of the Banbury Unitarian Fellowship**. Some members have been poorly in the last few months, but the spirit of the congregation is strong. We are planning a meal together at the end of January.

**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 **Spring Training Day**, on the topic *Ministering To Our Communities Part Two*, will be taking place on Saturday 13th February at Unitarian New Meeting Church, Birmingham. Led by myself and Rev. Michael Dadson, minister of Macclesfield Unitarians, and well known to many as our former District Minister, I hope it will help members of MUA congregations to care for each other. See page 16 for full details).

This year we will be running the **Worship Studies Course Foundation Step** for the fifth time of asking, with guest speakers Dr. Jane Russell, Rev. Winnie Gordon, Rev. Ant Howe, and Rev. Stephen Lingwood. It is a GA-recognised qualification, and really helps people to lead worship in our churches and chapels confidently and well. (see page 32 for full details).

In October, I started 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, see page 30.

In November, I took on the role of **Course Administrator for the Worship Studies Course**. My colleague and friend, **Rev. Winnie Gordon**, had carried out this role with great skill for the past few years, but on the retirement of Dawn Buckle as Convenor and Course Mentor of the Worship Studies Course Group, Winnie has taken on that role. So I have become the Administrator, and am looking forward to working closely with Winnie and the other Worship Studies Course tutors to maintain the very high standards of this nationally-recognised course. As I said above, we will be running the Foundation Step again in the Midlands this Spring.

Finally, from 1st January 2016, I have been called to be quarter-time **Minister of Northampton Unitarians**, in addition to my District ministry.

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

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## MUA Executive Committee Key Messages

The Key Messages below, from our October and November meetings have already been shared in the relevant issues of *Bits & Pieces*, the monthly news-sheet sent to all congregations. Only the messages which have not been overtaken by events are included here:

### October 2015:

1. MU Now: in order to save hundreds of pounds in postage costs, the publication dates of MU Now have been moved on one month. So the next issue will be coming out in January 2016,

followed by the Spring issue in May, and the Summer/Autumn issue in September.

### November 2015:

1. New Joint Ministry: In addition to the 20 hours a week currently worked as District Minister & minister of the Banbury Fellowship, Rev. Sue Woolley will be undertaking a quarter-time ministry (10 hours a week) for Northampton Unitarians, starting on 1st January 2016.

2. National Executive Committee Link: we were happy to welcome Dr. Jacky Woodman of the National EC to our meeting for the first time. Dr. Woodman gave us an update on the Vision Day at Sheffield on 21st November.

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e-mails: janecouper@hotmail.co.uk; revsuewoolley@gmail.com

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## 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, with the title *Celebrating Our Community: A Short History of the Midland Unitarian Association, and Original Words by Unitarians from the Midlands*. The bulk of it consists of **original worship material, provided by our many talented writers and poets in the Midlands congregations.** I have been delighted at the variety and quality of the contributions. Thank you to everyone who sent something in.

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.

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## MUA Annual Lunch, 31st October 2015

**Rev. Winnie Gordon challenges us to find the spiritual in our everyday lives**

Unitarians from around the Midlands gathered on a fine October day to share our Annual Lunch at Kingswood Meeting House. Following some very time-appropriate devotions from Rev. Ant Howe, in which he recalled what we owe to our Unitarian forebears, Rev. Winnie Gordon started her talk with a moment of silence, so that those present could centre themselves, followed by the lovely hymn from the purple book *Come and Find the Quiet Centre*, which set the tone for what was to follow.

Winnie's message was that no matter how busy our lives are, we should try to find time to make spirituality the centre, around and through which everything else happens. It should be embedded in the fabric of our everyday lives - if it is, it will lead to enhanced physical and mental well-being. It is about how we cultivate

connection with something greater than ourselves; how we find time in our busy lives to do some spiritual work.

She appreciated that we are all very busy people, who might struggle to find the time to be alone daily to be spiritual, but reassured us that it need only be five or ten or fifteen minutes. And that we needn't "leave the world" to do it. The yearning to connect with the mystery is a very deep part of humankind.

She explained that there were three steps to making this change:

1. taking the time to connect with your spirituality
2. defining your spiritual practice
3. engaging in the practice, regularly and with intention.

Finding space in your life begins with finding space in your day. She gave everyone a handout with four boxes, labelled *Daily*, *Weekly*, *Monthly*, *Annually* and asked us to think about what we did in these time frames which connected us to the spiritual life, and to record them. She gave one interesting example from her own life - when she used to work in a prison, she used to drive out of the car park, and then park up in a layby, and just sit in silence in her car, to let go of the tension of having to be somebody else during her working day. It was an intentional daily practice, and hence spiritual.

Winnie acknowledged that it can be a struggle to define and engage in a spiritual practice. But she reassured us that even mundane, everyday tasks such as washing up, Hoovering, and stretching, if done mindfully, and with intention, could be spiritual practices. [There is a wonderful book by Frederic & Mary-Ann Brussat, called *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life*, which has loads of brilliant examples of this - Ed.] Listening to music, being in nature, interaction with loved ones,

random acts of kindness, expressing our grief and suffering - all these can be spiritual practices.

One very simple practice, which everyone could do, is to reflect on your day, last thing at night, and consider what had been done well, what had not gone so well, and then to let it go. The important thing is to have a regular spiritual practice, which we do daily, authentically, and with intention.

By the end of her talk, I think we were all convinced that finding the spiritual in our everyday lives was not just an esoteric practice for the few - we could all have a go.

So take your time, define your practice, and engage in it, with your whole heart. If you can make this a regular part of your life, you will come to notice that you are more grounded, more centred, more at peace, with yourself and the world. It can be hard work at first - I read somewhere that it takes 30 repetitions to establish a new habit - so why not decide what you want to do, and make a commitment to yourself to start doing whatever it is on the first of next month, every day for a month.

We then all adjourned to the schoolroom, where Jill Bowie and her team had laid on a delicious lunch. Our community was renewed, in food, faith and fellowship. Our annual commitment to this special occasion might also be considered to be a spiritual practice!

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## **Ministering to Our Communities Part One: A Report**

13 Unitarians from seven congregations gathered at Unitarian New Meeting Church on a sunny Autumn Saturday, to discover how Unitarian congregations in three different settings minister to their communities.

The first speaker was Diane Rutter, Lay Assistant of Kingswood, who summed up her talk in her first sentence: "ministering to our community one cup of tea and one piece of cake at a time." Diane, whose job title is 'Lay Assistant' sees her role as building bridges with the local community. She attends everything in the village at least once, including other church's coffee mornings. Some of her hints and tips included the following:

- look at the age demographic of the people who use the building (not just those who come to worship on a Sunday).
- check out the facilities available in your community, and then gap-fill.
- running a group is quite a commitment. If you are running it, you have to be there, every time. You do it with a good grace, or not at all. Hours have to be flexible.
- It's about meeting people where they are.
- monitor your hours and look after yourself. Remember that going out and about is work.
- Pastoral visiting - people often prefer to be taken out somewhere rather than visited at home. Most people want two hours. Pastoral visits are draining - you need to take an hour or so to recover afterwards.
- Carry 'lunch money' envelopes around for whenever people want to give you money.
- Allow time to move things on / turn them around / repair them. Give something at least a year to decide whether it works. BUT never become so invested in something that you aren't prepared to knock it on the head if it's not working.
- Pinch other people's ideas and adapt them.
- Be aware that as people get older, events will have to move from evenings to lunchtimes, as older people won't come out at night, especially in the winter.

The second speaker was Rev. Nicky Jenkins, minister of Chorlton Unitarians. Chorlton is a leafy suburb of Manchester, which in recent years has become "an area accepting of alternative lifestyles." Many other groups use the building. Like Diane, she emphasised the importance of knowing the people in your area, and of getting out into the neighbourhood. Some of Nicky's hints and tips were as follows:

- download A3 posters from UCCN and General Assembly websites and laminate for outdoor use (also on walls of church / chapel).
- Put out Unitarian leaflets etc when other groups are using the building.
- use Meet Up to publicise your events - you have to subscribe to it. This means that you can categorise your events, using lots of search terms. Then information about your events is e-mailed to Meet Up users according to the interests they have flagged up.
- If members of your congregation are involved in different groups in the community, try to build on that.
- A friendly welcome is of central importance.

But the main focus of Nicky's presentation was Café Church, an informal gathering every 5th Sunday. It was started three years ago with the idea of providing an alternative to a regular church service. The theme is something very general, the room is set up with small tables plus four chairs around each table. Quote slips about the (very broad) theme are put on each table as an icebreaker, and folk are encouraged to mix themselves up

Good tea and coffee is essential, preferably fair traded. Food is brought by members. The format of the "service" is very informal and not "churchy". A typical session might include: opening words / music / discussion starter / poetry / time of stillness and

reflection / poetry / music / final discussion. Food is available throughout, and people can leave before the end.



The final speaker was Kate McKenna, who spoke about the Octagon Chapel Norwich's growing engagement with the LGBT community in Norwich. She explained how the Chapel's involvement with Norwich Pride had evolved from the first one in 2011, which was attended by a few Unitarians as private individuals. The following year, the 365 metre balcony of the Town Hall was swathed in a rainbow flag made of thousands of knitted squares made by various religious communities in the city. This was also the year that the Chapel hosted the post-Pride worship service. In 2013, there was a more visible Unitarian presence - they painted their own banner and were part of the campaign for equal marriage. A tradition has grown up of providing an LGBT appropriate background (e.g. a rainbow) against which anyone can be photographed. In 2014, they gave out blank posters with "I believe" written at the top, and invited people to complete them in their own words. Hundreds of people did, and had photos taken. In 2015, they were instrumental in setting up Faith in Pride, a collaborative venture with Quakers, Goddess worshippers, three Anglican churches, Buddhists and Liberal Jews.

Following on from the Autumn Training Day, we are pleased to announce:

## Spring Training Day: Ministering to Our Communities (Part Two)

**Revs. Michael Dadson and Sue Woolley** will be leading this exciting workshop, in which participants will be able to learn about providing pastoral care in their communities.

**When:** Saturday 13th February 2016

**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

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## Rites of Passage Course

2015 was the first year in which the Midland Unitarian Association of Lay Preachers and Service Leaders ran the national Rites of Passage Course. We were a little disappointed to only attract six participants from five MUA congregations, but we also had four out-of-District participants, from as far afield as Bradford, Wakefield, London, and Portsmouth.

Our Course Leaders were Rev. Martin Whitell, District Minister of the London District & Provincial Assembly, who gave us a really thorough training on Weddings; Rev. Lynne Readett, member of the National Executive Committee, who covered all



aspects of Naming Ceremonies / Christenings; and our own Rev. Ant Howe, minister of Kingswood, who led a fascinating day about Funerals.

The fourth day, which the participants approached with some trepidation, was assessment day. Each participant had been asked to put together a short Rite of Passage of their choice, together with a brief explanation of the context. I was astounded by the skill and inventiveness shown by the celebrants - most were not content to offer a straight-forward service - we had a same-sex wedding, a funeral for a child, and a wedding which included a beautiful sand ceremony.

Although one of the ten participants did not attend on this final assessment day, having decided that conducting rites of passage was not for them, I believe that the course overall was a resounding success, and look forward to running it again in 2017.



Rites of Passage course participants

## District Round-up

### Black Country Group

2015 has been a sad one for BCG. My husband Ken, died in October; his Farewell, an occasion of love and gentle humour, was conducted by Rev. Penny Johnson, who, as my bridesmaid, had offered to marry Ken when he was tired of me. This never happened, thank God! Rev. Sue Woolley and Gavin Lloyd gave their time to read from the Wisdom of Solomon 'The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God.....' And *Desiderata*. To them, my thanks.

Another sadness is caused by the increasing frailty of Mrs. Irene Hickman. She has been a member of Dudley Old Meeting House since her childhood, and now can no longer attend unless someone from the family brings her. She is much missed for her pleasant and cheerful company and her willingness to help wherever and whenever it was needed.

We ended our Services at Dudley in 2015 with the Carol Service conducted by Gavin Lloyd of Oxford. Amidst the traditional carols and readings was a reading out of the ordinary - the Annunciation as revealed in *The Qur'an*.

The first 2016 act of worship was led by Philip Niblock, and was on the theme 'From those to whom much is given, much is expected' – a timely reminder, perhaps, when our country is being 'invaded' by those who have nothing.

Though not strictly Black Country – a note from Stourbridge. A Christmas dinner was arranged for 'the 11th night', to which I was invited. A very pleasant evening and a chance to talk to and David and Carolyn Taylor. (see below for a report of this

occasion). David is taking the Worship Studies Course Foundation Step this Spring, and will be leading the service at Dudley in January.

As this is the first MU Now of 2016, the BCGUC wish you all A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

### Barbara Russell

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#### Stourbridge

On Tuesday 5th January the congregation met up for a New Year's meal at The White Horse carvery in Stourbridge. We had hoped to make it in the run up to Christmas, but it was difficult finding a suitable day when we could all make it, so we opted for the new year, but just got it into the 12 Days of Christmas.

The picture shows L-R Audrey Green, David and Carolyn Taylor, Pam Archer, Barbara Russell, and David Mearman enjoying the informal after-meal conversations. Pam, although belonging to another Church, attends services when she can, and has shown a keen interest in the Unitarian movement along with our church and its influence on local history, also providing various items of interesting research with connection to our church.



Barbara from Wolverhampton of course hardly needs introduction to the MUA, having taken Services in most of our Churches, and as a past President. She has provided tremendous help and support to our congregation over the years, as indeed she has to many other congregations, and it seemed only right that "Auntie " Barbara should be with us on this occasion.

### David Mearman

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#### Something's Up at Shrewsbury!

Over the last couple of months there's been a big increase in the numbers of people coming to the Sunday services at Shrewsbury Unitarian Church. We're not quite sure why, but the increase does coincide with our taking on Fiona Checkley as our Congregation Support Worker. She is doing a lot to raise our profile locally [as well as via our web-site] and forge links with other organisations and local activities – such as the Shrewsbury Festival of Literature. Whatever the reasons, we're now getting 30+ attending our 10.30 services, including many people new to Unitarianism. Circle meetings have had to be moved upstairs to the schoolroom for lack of space where we usually hold them at the back of the church. We've had to order 15 new hymn-books, both Sing Your Faith and Hymns For Living. We are in the process of designing and producing a church banner, and there will be new notice boards outside the church so we can re-design our weekly 'advertising' of services and events, and hopefully attract even more people. We've also installed a Wi-Fi connection at the church, and have an excellent Facebook page which Alison Patrick updates regularly. Efforts are being made to have the church open a lot more than the current Tuesday afternoons and Sunday mornings.

There is a real 'buzz' about the church at the moment, which is generating a lot of excitement and hope for the future. We Unitarians have a lot to offer, and we hope that our growth will continue.

**David Wood**

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## 2016: A Brave New Year for Northampton Unitarians

At the end of 2014, our Chairman Jon Small wrote in our newsletter: "This year has seen some changes and not a little excitement! A little while ago we thought our collective prayers had been answered when the Christian Science Church came on the market ... but the Central Mosque further along the road got there first, so we are still at Hazelwood Road. This experience has led to a reinvigoration of our search for a more suitable home, who knows, by this time next year we may be in a new, better building." We did not know how prescient those words were!



31 Hazelwood Road, all packed up and ready to go



It is now "this time next year" and we are indeed in a new, better building. Less than three months after first viewing it, on a warm September evening, and thanks to the generosity of the Midland Unitarian Association, who gave us a short-term bridging loan,

and to the hard work of all concerned, Northampton Unitarians moved into our new home, Northampton Unitarians Meeting House.

The move took place on Friday 11th December; the Saturday was spent getting organised and tidying round, and we met for worship for the first time in our new home at 10.30 am on Sunday 13th December.



The Manfield Room - our main worship space

As well as the two main rooms, the Manfield Room, which will be our main worship space, and the Martin Weiss Room, which will be used for other-than-Sunday gatherings and committee meetings, we also have a sizeable kitchen, an office / Vestry for our new quarter-time minister, and a storage room. There are ladies and gents toilets, and we intend to convert the gents into a disabled toilet during 2016. The Martin Weiss Room chairs were a kindly gift from the Black Country Group of Unitarians, based at Old Meeting House Dudley. The stained glass chalice you can see on the wall was commissioned from Elizabeth Faiers of York Unitarians, and installed & dedicated on 10th January 2016.



Rev. Sue Woolley, whom we have called to a quarter-time ministry from 1st January 2016, led our first service, on the theme of Hope. She shared a quote by Goethe, which a Unitarian friend had sent to her:

"The moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents ... and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."

Sue commented "I am still finding it hard to believe that we are here, *less than three months* since Simon, David, and I first viewed this place, and instantly knew that it was ideal for us. It has felt like a long journey, with a few twists and turns along the way, but actually the speed at which everything has fallen into place has been dizzying. There has been an amazing grace about it all."



Another view of the Manfield Room  
taken just before our first service on Sunday 13th December



The Martin Weiss Room, named after our late, beloved Treasurer.  
This room is used for other-than-Sunday groups and committee meetings.



A view of the kitchen before moving in



The partly unpacked Vestry



The Meeting House from the outside

2016 is our new beginning as a congregation. We have hopes and dreams and a vision, and are moving towards making them come true.

**Sue Woolley**

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### **Kidderminster: Looking Backwards, Looking Forwards**

Over the last few months, the Kidderminster congregation have been commemorating the 400th anniversary of the birth of Richard Baxter, the Puritan divine. Some extracts from their newsletter:

"On Tuesday 12th October, on behalf of the Kidderminster Civic Society and the Baxter-linked churches, we hosted a presentation by Don Gilbert on the life of Richard Baxter and the history behind the Baxter Pulpit. This fascinating event reminded us of

what an heroic figure Baxter was, operating as a Puritan in very difficult times.

Don Gilbert's talk also brought out some intriguing facts about the pulpit itself. For example, until Roger Mathews brought it to his attention, Don had been unaware that the original 12th century plinth on which the pulpit had sat in St. Mary's parish church is located in New Meeting House - supporting the 1621 Pulpit beneath the flooring.



image from Kidderminster Unitarians' website

Also, if you examine the pulpit carefully, you will see that the name of the benefactor, Alice Dawkes, is carved in two places, even though other evidence of her has been removed. And the quotation from Psalm 105 that adorns the headboard reveals a

battle of dogma from centuries ago. It is actually a hybrid quotation to accommodate various Biblical versions of the Psalm."

### Ash James

"The celebrations of the anniversary of Richard Baxter's birth ... ended with the actual date of his birth on 12th November 1615. On 12th November 2015, the three churches closely associated with him: St. Mary's, the Baxter United Reformed Church, and ourselves, paid a final tribute.

On the steps of the Baxter Church, a large iced birthday cake was cut into three sections by the ministers of the three churches. An extra from Richard Baxter's book relating to his ministerial experiences in Kidderminster was then read out by a convincing and appropriately-dressed lookalike of Baxter himself.

From the Baxter Church, a group proceeded to St. Mary's for an old-fashioned, but moving communion service which was joined by some of our own congregation. The birthday ended with a song and dance celebration in Kidderminster Town Hall.

The three churches were open again to visitors on the next two days, and it was a great delight for us to welcome so many, particularly from St. Mary's.

There is no doubt that the celebrations brought the three churches together in a big way, and that a huge debt of thanks is owed to Theo Mayfield of St. Mary's, who did a great deal of hard work in organising the various events. Long may the co-operation continue!"

### Graham Williams

Community Facilitator Aleks Zglinska shared some of her plans for the future in the Kidderminster newsletter:

"Something different that you may have heard we are going to try is a project called The Red Door Café. The idea is that we now have a lovely cosy welcoming space in the Pearsall Room, and as well as the drop-in coffee morning / café church we already have on a Friday, it would be great to use this space on a Thursday to provide events specifically aimed at various groups in our local area. Parents and toddlers, self-employed individuals in the creative industries, adults with learning needs, disabilities or mental health problems. The vision for the café is not to be open all the time, but to have a rolling programme of events that people can come along to that meet their own requirements.

So for parents and pre-schoolers, there will be a Story Café with a space to explore a story and do craft activities together. There will be a Colouring Meditation Café for adults, to allow a space for calm, reflection, and gentle company for those who need such a space in their lives. There are a few different ideas too for pop-up events that the Café can host, but the idea is to give us a further outlet for sharing our work that is clearly accessible and open to the wider community, with specific groups being targeted. It makes the best use of my time and our resources to work in this way, providing for the specific needs of different people."

### Aleks Zglinska

[The Café is holding its first drop-in day on Saturday 16th January, just after this magazine goes to press. Watch this space!]

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# **Cotswold Group Retreat Day – some impressions...** **(from the Cotswold Group Newsletter)**

## **Unitarian Vision**

Getting up at 7.00 a.m. urrg! Still, I travel to Bayshill with John and Judith W and we have a good old catch up. The Hall is so bright and light, last time I was here it was really doleful, what an improvement! Excellent coffee gets me ready to work. A truly beautiful meditation from the Old Testament given by John W; "*Be Still, Know that I am*". Then into groups to think and share our meanings of Faith and Belief. There are people here who I have never met before but I feel perfectly safe to say anything at all and Unitarians are so good at thinking! Faith is such a difficult word and Belief is impossible! Richard calls God "*The wholeness of reality*", wonderful. Then we move to Worship. We all want variety. John P says the worship should be "awakening", a perfect description.

The afternoon is given over to Outreach and Pastoral care. Our group is agreed we surely can not reach everyone? Yet despite all the secular professional care available now, we still all want a pastor. We end with a meditation from Kevin. Yes the words "*sitting on a rock in the rain*" definitely speak to me. Don blows out the candle with a blessing. I am so glad that I moved that clutter away from it earlier!

Home with dear Isabel. A good day's work but oh yes we still have another day to do!

**Helen Parsons (Cirencester)**

## **A Personal Response**

What an interesting and – for me at least – a worthwhile day this turned out to be. Perhaps it is partly due to my being fairly fresh to Unitarianism that I felt so particularly stimulated and, consequently, animated by such a diverse range of observations and attitudes emerging? Certainly I can say that I went along with no more than quiet expectation, but I came away enlivened and feeling even more glad about having discovered Unitarianism.

**John Hall (Evesham)**

*Cotswold Group Retreat Day Part 2 will be on Saturday 27th February.*

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## **SEEKER SEEKING SEEKERS**

You may have read that I am training to be a Spiritual Director. Unlike therapy, spiritual direction is not necessarily centred around a problem, although it could be. Often it begins with a desire to grow - to move beyond the place where one is to a deeper, richer place.

Spirituality is not a distinct area of life, but a dimension of all life. God is not present to us only when we pray; nor is spiritual growth confined to such times. Therefore, spiritual direction is not just focused on the obvious aspects of a spiritual life: prayer, religious vocation, temptations, delusions, and other such things.

Since there is no area of human life where God is uninterested...no corner of it in which the Holy Mystery is not present...no aspect of life is inappropriate to bring to spiritual direction. **God is the deepest dimension in all areas of human life:** thus, all areas are open to spiritual direction.

At this point in the course, I need willing "directees" to practice my skills on. So if you are interested in going deeper on your spiritual journey, please get in touch. (details on page 3) Thank you.

**Sue Woolley**



## FEELING DRAWN TO MINISTRY?

Maybe you have felt an inkling of a call to become a Unitarian or  
Free Christian minister

Maybe it's still a secret that you dare not speak

Maybe it's something so precious you don't want to question it

**The Ministerial Fellowship** is hosting

### **A weekend retreat**

for you to discern whether or not you might pursue a path in  
Unitarian ministry.

**When:** 27th - 29th May 2016 (Friday pm - Sunday lunchtime)

**Where:** Luther King House,  
Brighton Grove, Manchester M14 5JP

**Cost:** £40, including meals and accommodation  
(costs subsidised by the Millennium Fund)

- Listen to your soul
- Talk with experienced ministers
- Personal exploration

Bookings limited to 15

Members of the Interview Panel & Ministry Strategy Group are not involved  
with the planning or hosting of this retreat.

Further information and bookings from:  
Rev. Nicky Jenkins on [revnickyj@icloud.com](mailto:revnickyj@icloud.com)  
or ring 0161 224 5289

NB This is **not** a replacement for the Inquiry Day (where you can  
ask questions about practicalities) but rather a precursor.

Deadline for Applications is 29th February 2016

## Worship Studies Course Foundation Step

**Led by:** Winnie Gordon, Ant Howe, Stephen Lingwood,  
Jane Russell, and Sue Woolley

**When:** Saturdays 23rd April, 14th May, 11th June 2016

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

**Time:** 10.00 am – 4.15 pm (coffee/tea available from 9.30 am)

**Cost:** £39 to MUA participants / £48 to others

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## MUA 150th Annual General Meeting

For this very special occasion, we are hoping that at least one  
person from EVERY congregation in the District will be able to  
attend, together with your congregation's banner, if any.

Our NEW book *Celebrating Our Community: A Short History of the  
Midland Unitarian Association and Original Words by Unitarians  
from the Midlands*, is to be launched on the day, and copies will  
be available for purchase.

**When:** Saturday 26th March 2016

**Where:** Kidderminster New Meeting House,  
Church St, Kidderminster DY10 2AR

**Time:** 10.30 am for 11.00 am

**Guest Speaker:** Rev. Ant Howe,  
Minister of Kingswood Meeting House

**Cost:** £5.00 a head for lunch



## 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 |
|---------|----------------------|----------|

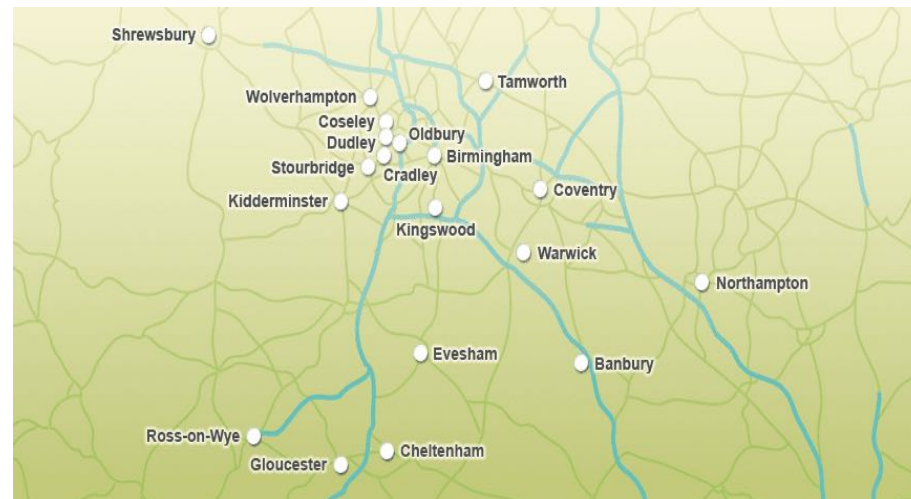
## MUA Congregations: Contact Details

| 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        |

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

### Unitarianism by Lewis Connolly

Unitarianism is where we proudly own the heresy label.  
 Boldly disavow the centre-ground, and the respectable.  
 Brazenly stand shoulder to shoulder with our fellow misfits and rebels.  
 Unitarianism is a place to grow, to unfold, to stretch out.  
 Fearlessly and joyfully ferreting and shuffling our way down new paths.  
 Wilfully declaring our unified oneness, in spite of our spacious uniqueness.  
 Unitarianism does not dream of imagined pasts, or wallow in the mire of lifeless custom.  
 Foolishly we will play the jester to point the way towards a world of unshackled souls.  
 Profusely striving as dreamers do, towards a world of liberty and happiness.  
 For in this space beyond assumption, beyond the centre, we live, we strive, we have our being.  
 Amen.



**The Spring 2016 issue will be published in May**

**Please may we have your contributions on local matters,  
 & on the theme of "Appreciating What We Have"**

**by Friday 6th May 2016**

*Thank you!*