

MU NOW



THE MAGAZINE OF
THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN
ASSOCIATION

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From the Editor

Welcome to the Winter 2016 / 17 issue of *MU Now*. This issue contains some very interesting contributions. I am particularly grateful to out-going President, Jane Couper, not only for her final President's Piece, which contains much food for thought, but also her fascinating contribution to our theme "Is Unitarianism a Faith?"

I am also grateful to the hard-working editors and contributors to our congregational newsletters, without which this issue would be a very thin one indeed. Thank you all!

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 or to 5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN. THANK YOU!

The theme for the next issue is "How can we make a difference?" and the deadline for submissions will be **Friday 12th May 2017**.

Sue Woolley

President's Piece



Greetings, for what is by now not such a new year. It's probably old enough already for our hopes for a brand-new start to have dwindled on both the personal front and in the broader arena. For me, the time between the start of Advent and my mid-January birthday (securely positioned "in the bleak mid-winter") always seems to pass very

quickly, because there are significant waymarks during those seven weeks to speed the days along. But then come the dreary days, days of waiting and anticipation, like those in Advent, but with few significant highlights. They seem slow to pass. Their darkness is not softened or enlivened by any artifice; no fairy lights, no tinsel, no glitter or shine. Yet they bring their own, quieter, signs and gifts. Gradually increasing light, small green shoots, the earliest flowers (apparently fragile but surprisingly resilient) and slowly fattening buds. Waiting, watching, hoping, trusting. A time of holding fast to experience and keeping faith that the natural order of the world will follow its accustomed path. Counting the daily increments of light, we pass from short days of slippery footpaths, frozen windscreens and iron hard soil to longer, lighter ones as the world slowly yields to the inevitable change. As in our individual existences, there can be unexpected moments of surprise and relief, found in stark, brilliantly bright days of dazzling sunshine, in frost highlighted by the bluest of skies and vivid sunsets. In Britain, we don't expect a smooth trajectory towards Spring, but we do trust the uneven journey to reach its time-honoured destination.

It may be a new year but we should cast a backward look to the end of October and our last District gathering, the MUA Annual Lunch. We shared worship led by Diane Rutter, then listened intently and

admiringly to Patricia Earle's account of how her commitment to work for peace developed. We heard how, starting from small beginnings, her involvement grew and grew to the point that she needed to extend her house to accommodate increasingly large meetings. Afterwards we enjoyed an excellent lunch from our regular caterers, and hospitality from Kingswood. The occasion felt particularly warm and friendly, with much chatter and laughter. It was especially good to welcome newer faces who attended for the first time, and we hope they'll join us again next year.

As my two years of office draw to their close, I want to express my admiration and thanks for the dedicated work that goes on in this District. I'm now in a position to know exactly how much effort it takes to run this widespread MUA efficiently while always remaining mindful of our constituent congregations and members. The knowledge, expertise and readiness of the officers to work on our behalf is outstanding. Committee members come together to share in a vision broader than simply that of their own congregational interests. For their remarkable spirit of generosity, fairness and co-operation I have been very grateful. I want to record my indebtedness to our District Minister, Sue Woolley, and Treasurer, Sandy Ellis for their guidance and unfailing encouragement. At our AGM Diane Rutter, from Kingswood, will become our next President, I am sure she will take office with our best wishes and warm support.

Finally, I would like to mention that our Spring Training day is now in view. It will look at the differing ways Unitarians have developed of holding communion services. That's another topic that has caused some strong feelings, so do come, share and learn. Our training days have an excellent record of encouraging fellowship, meetings with new people, learning and exploring. The session is free, and hope, trust and faith are always present. Grab a March bargain and join in!

Jane Couper: tel: 01386-839458; janecouper@hotmail.co.uk

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 have now completed my fifth year as **Minister of the Banbury Unitarian Fellowship**. We are ticking along nicely, but are sad that Malcolm Sadler has now moved into a nursing home in Kenilworth.

Leading worship around the Midland Unitarian Association: My diary for **2017** is now full - I am leading worship somewhere near you practically every Sunday between now and the end of this year, except for the months of my Sabbatical. I look forward to seeing you in your churches and chapels as and when.

Our **Autumn Training Day**, on the topic *Engaging with Unitarianism: A Workshop on Engagement Groups and Sharing Our Ethos* took place on Saturday 15th October. It was a really interesting day.

The **Spring Training Day**, on the topic *How Unitarians Do Communion*, is happening on Saturday 4th March, at Kingswood. I hope that many Unitarians from around the District will be curious enough to come along, for what promises to be a fascinating day.

We will once again be running the national **Rites of Passage Course**, on the first Saturdays in April, May, June, and July. A flyer has gone round to all MUA contacts. This year, it will be led by Rev. Martin Whitell (Weddings), Rev. Ant Howe (Funerals) and myself and Ant (Baptisms / Namings).

I'm now part-way through my final year on 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. Please contact me if you are interested.

Finally, I have now completed my first year as **Minister of Northampton Unitarians**, in addition to my District ministry. Our other-than-Sunday activities are going well, and we were pleased to welcome one new member in December.

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 here:

1. MUA Annual General Meeting: the date for the 2017 AGM was set for Saturday 25th March, at Kingswood. Rev. Danny Crosby is to be our Guest Speaker (see page 24).

2. Sabbatical: Rev. Sue Woolley had circulated a paper, requesting that she be granted a 10-week sabbatical from July - September 2017. This was approved unanimously by the Committee, subject to the addition of a week 11, because she is intending to work during week 8. (More details about this will be circulated nearer the time).

3. Management of Investments: At the Treasurer's request, and with the unanimous agreement of the Committee, it was decided to transfer management of the MUA's investment portfolio to Harris Allday, investment brokers.

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

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MUA Annual Lunch

Forty Unitarians from all over the Midlands and beyond (we had two visitors, from Hinckley and Cardiff) came together at Kingswood Meeting House this Saturday for the MUA Annual Lunch. This year our guest speaker was Patricia Earle, of the Women's Federation for World Peace. Patricia spoke to us for an hour, sharing her passion for peace and reconciliation, and stories of how, from a very small beginning, she now hosts regular meetings for between 100 and 150 women of all faiths, in her own twice-extended home.

Topics at these meetings are many and varied, from raising awareness of the different conflicts going on in the world, through various issues pertaining to women, such as domestic violence, trafficking, breakdowns in families, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation. She provides a safe and sacred space in which women of all races and cultures and faiths can share from the heart. It was inspirational to hear her speak (see article below).



We then moved to the Schoolroom for the traditional, and delicious, Lunch. Jill Bowie and her assistants had performed

their usual miracles, and provided us all with a tasty meal, catering for all tastes. It was an opportunity to share food together, and to spend time in conversation, getting to know Unitarians from other congregations around the Midlands. It was a most enjoyable occasion.

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## Patricia Earle's Journey In Faith

At our Annual Lunch at the end of October, we were privileged to hear Patricia Earle tell the story of her journey in faith. Patricia is the Midlands representative of the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), and her story is inspirational.

This small, softly-spoken woman came to England from Belgium over forty years ago. She has been involved in peace-related activities in Birmingham since 1993. It all started when the WFWP organised a chain of prayer all over Europe for people affected by or involved in the conflict in Bosnia. Patricia opened her house to anyone who wanted to get involved, and they met twice during the 40 days of the chain of prayer.

Since then, she has hosted regular meetings in her home, which has been extended twice to accommodate the increasing numbers, and can now "seat" between 100 and 150 women at a time. At first, her work was broadly ecumenical, but over the years it has grown more into inter-faith. Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish, Bah'ai and Unitarian women come along to listen to the invited speakers share what is in their hearts, in what has become a safe and sacred space for all.

In the early years, meetings were mainly about the various conflicts going on around the world - speakers directly involved would come along to share their stories. This has expanded over time into issues of concern to women from domestic violence and

family breakdown, through sex trafficking to hot issues such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation. As well as the healing topics of peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

The usual format for an evening meeting is that the guest speaker talks first, which is followed by open sharing. Then there is a time of stillness and reflection - devotions are offered by women from different religious groups. They pray for the world and for each other. It is about women coming together with idealism and sincerity, and finding out how much they have in common. God works through all religions. The space Patricia offers enables women to learn to love God and their neighbours, and to overcome prejudice.

She commented that they can feel God's presence during the time of prayer. The meetings are not just about talking and raising awareness, but also about doing things which make a difference. She shared a couple of examples: one meeting resulted in the formation of a group of women from different faiths doing hospital visiting; another inspired the formation of the Inter-Faith Tapestry Group. The resultant beautiful tapestry now hangs in the Inter-Faith Centre of Birmingham's new Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and the group, who have now spent several years meeting together, chatting and sewing together, are now concentrating on making blankets for those in need.

She explained that from a small beginning at a WFWP meeting, large impacts have often occurred. The power of women coming together to work for peace, and a better world. In July 2008, they participated with 350 women in a Bridge of Peace event, which was about building friendship on a one-to-one basis, across religious, racial, and cultural divides. She has organised inter-faith visits to the Holy Land, looking at both sides of the conflict, and

the group has spoken to the United Nations, and the UK and European Parliaments.

One of the things of which she is most proud is the foundation of an Inter-Faith Orphanage for *dalit* (untouchable) children in Hyderabad in India, which is now thriving. Many of the children go on to lead successful lives, which would not have happened otherwise.



Patricia at the Orphanage (image birminghammail.co.uk)

She believes that it is possible to break down barriers, change concepts, remove prejudice, and build genuine friendship through discovering our common humanity, our shared feelings and life experiences. Which bring us to that place where our hearts can join as one. She concluded with a beautiful quotation from Longfellow: "If we can read the secret histories of our enemies, we should find in each person's life sorrow and suffering - enough to disarm all hostilities."

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District Round-up

The January 2017 issue of the Shrewsbury newsletter included an interesting article on ethical investments, by their Treasurer,

David Wood, which members of other MUA congregations may wish to think about, in the context of their own congregation's investments:

Are Shrewsbury Unitarian Church's investments ethical?

An ethical investment is one that avoids investment in companies linked with any of the following: armaments and nuclear weapons, animal exploitation, human rights abuse/oppressive regimes, environmentally damaging practices, poor employment practices, alcohol, tobacco, gambling and pornography. Of the investments held by SUC only GlaxoSmithKline might be considered to fall foul of this list. This depends on whether you consider all drug testing on animals 'exploitation'. For GSK's take on this see <http://www.gsk.com/en-gb/research/our-use-of-animals/>. Our holding in GSK is 3.9% of the total investments.

We also hold shares (3.5% of the total) in Royal Dutch Shell. Some people may consider this unethical, but all petrochemical companies are actively involved in researching non-fossil fuel energy. In 1998, prompted in part by two major environmental scandals, Shell published a report called 'Profits and Principles – Does there have to be a choice?' In it, the company outlined a commitment to social responsibility that is admirable, and highly unusual from an oil company. In its social and environmental reporting, 'no oil company studied was as transparent as Shell' say Madrid's Management and Excellence survey of oil company ethics, in which Shell comes top.

We have a large holding in the COIF [= Charities Official Investment Fund ~ 48.8% total]. This fund follows an ethical investment policy, because while delivery of sustainable long-term returns is a central requirement for the fund, they do assess environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks in making any investments. High ESG risks will count against companies and in

some cases will be a critical factor in deciding not to invest. They claim to be a leader in stewardship and ethics; their approach to stewardship was rated as A+ in the most recent United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment (UN PRI) survey and they are a signatory of UN PRI and the UK Stewardship Code.

We receive advice on our investments from Graham White (a fellow Unitarian from Kingswood Meeting House) and I quote: *'We can of course discuss the portfolio in more detail when we meet, including the question of ethical investment. Suffice it to say that I am well satisfied with the content and am not recommending any changes for the moment. This year, many ethical funds have underperformed most unit trusts. This is because of the very nature of ethical investments. These funds have little or no exposure to resources, tobacco or pharmaceutical stocks, & thanks to sterling's fall this has increased the stock market price of investments dominated by overseas earnings.'*

You may be interested to know that the GA has its investments in Newton Growth & Income Fund for Charities which invests 82% in equities including Diageo PLC (gin, whisky, rum etc) and companies that may derive some of their income (provided < 10%) from tobacco production. This simply demonstrates that 'ethical' investing can be interpreted widely.

David Wood (from Shrewsbury newsletter)

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### **Cheltenham & Gloucester Unitarians' Enneagram Workshop**

On Saturday 8th October we had a one day workshop as an introduction to the Enneagram with experienced teacher Josephine Seccombe. It was a fascinating and very successful day with about 25 people attending, where we learnt about the different behaviours and motivations of the nine personality types

– Perfectionist, Giver, Performer, Romantic, Observer, Questioner, Epicure, Protector and Mediator – and perhaps more importantly, learnt about the predominant aspects of our own individual personalities and how to empathise with others' motivations, to help us to achieve more effective communication in both personal and professional settings! Most of us are keen to pursue the topic in more depth, so hopefully this will be just the first in a number of Enneagram workshops over the next year.

### **Enneagram Workshop – Part 2**

On Saturday 4th February 2017 we will be holding our second one day training workshop on the Enneagram with experienced teacher Josephine Seccombe. Our first training day in October was fascinating and very successful, so I'm sure this second day will be equally interesting and informative. Details from Cressida Pryor, 01242 604120, or [zenziallink@hotmail.com](mailto:zenziallink@hotmail.com).

### **Cressida Pryor (from Cotswold Group Newsletter)**

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In its work for the community **Oat Street Chapel** has been regularly supporting the local Evesham charity organisation Caring Hands in the Vale and the Evesham District and Mental Health Support Services . The Christmas Madrigal and Mince Pies concert by local music group Musyck Anon that the chapel hosted raised over £175 for Alzheimers research. We were also open for worship on Christmas Day

In early June our chapel reached out to the public and made good use of its acoustic facilities by hosting a wonderful concert by a trio of local musicians local musicians Mike Weaver, Ashland and Colin Pitts who combined to make up "Folk Treble". In early July our chapel was venue for a family live poetry reading event

by local Worcester poet laureate Heather Wastie as part of the Evesham Festival of Words.

Internally, I would like to suggest that our most moving service of the year was the beautiful christening in August of our youngest chapel member Daniel Moyse conducted by Kath Forder, and that one of our most stirring services this year has been Muslim Educational Council Oxford (MECO) leader Dr Taj Hargey's address to us in Interfaith week. Finally, to culminate our local news, our most significant event this year has been the arrival of our new Minister, Rob Whiteman, who began his Ministry with us in early October and with whom we look forward to a long and fruitful partnership. We would also like to take this opportunity to more publicly thank our previous Minister, Don Phillips, for his many years of ministry to our congregation, to wish him and Linda a happy retirement and to say that his steady hand at the helm and his pastoral care in particular will be much missed.

Lesley Harris

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# **Roger Mathews retires from the role of Kidderminster's Treasurer**

Long-standing church treasurer Roger Mathews recently announced his retirement from the role of Treasurer, one that he has diligently and faithfully carried out for twenty years.

We are so very grateful to him for the work he has done. Roger is understandably looking forward to never having to see another money bag or the inside of the HSBC bank in Church Street. Instead, he will have even more opportunity to enjoy free time and wife Joyce's fabulous cakes, and to take a well-earned rest following our AGM, from onerous financial duties.

Thank you for all you have done, Roger.

**Ash James (from Kidderminster's newsletter)**

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Kidderminster's Jigsaws

It might feel a bit like they're taking over ... There is a library of them at the rear of the church, if anyone wants to borrow one. There are two puzzle boards hanging around in various corners ... and assorted bowls of pieces from our latest attempt are stowed away every Wednesday afternoon at around four o'clock.

We've completed a number of them in the last eight months ...

One brand new one Winnie bought us from the congregational trip to Oxford - well that one appears to be without one of the central pieces. We'll never know what happened to it ... unless we find it in a corner of the church. It may have disappeared up the vacuum cleaner, or wandered out into the street on the shoe of a visitor. It may of course never have made it into the box in the first place ... it might have been missing before we even realised it was gone!

Sometimes our ministry to one another as a congregation and community is a bit like that, there is a piece missing that until you build up around it you can't actually sense its absence. As I have been working with people via the Red Door Café, I've begun to see a few of the gaps ... They come to me as requests from people who have a need for something ... They appear out of nowhere, something we assumed we have been doing well, we find a way to refine and improve.

We started puzzling because Ann Latham made a couple of donations to our work, one of a puzzle board (replete with a little

of the tufted shed fur of Boots the cat stuck in the velcro!) and a puzzle of the Midlands area, which we started and completed during October. People talked about the places they had visited displayed in the image, many hands worked together to help get all the pieces laid out and joined up ... and there were no gaps this time.

I recently saw an 'infinity puzzle' - a jigsaw made so that every vertical and horizontal line of pieces connects with the next looping back to the other 'side' in a continuous process ... so it can be made up in 'infinite' combinations. Our community is a little more like this, with fuzzy edges and a different shape every time we put it together. ... How very wonderful that is.

Aleks Zglinska (from Kidderminster newsletter)

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### **Northampton Chairman's Chat**

First a traditional start! We're still here – not however, where we were last time we had an anniversary. This year, well, late last year, the most amazing thing occurred we were able to purchase this place. Superbly suited for our purpose. We no longer have toilets in the basement that smelt of damp, we no longer have a toilet in a precarious position at the top of the stairs. We don't have interesting cracks in the walls nor steep steps to get into the meeting. We've a ramp, toilets on the one and only floor, a kitchen instead of a sink in the corner and this lovely, large room for when we have a much larger congregation. Light, airy and in a much more public place than before.

It seemed as if everything fell into place I think we really did have G-D on our side!

So now we have a Meeting in a deprived area and a duty I feel to try to involve more of the immediate community and us with them. Things are already happening with the AA meeting here each week and hopefully we will get more and more local groups to meet here or we shall start them ourselves. Our minister has already started on this with two groups which are reasonably successful.

Another interesting fact is that we are now located only a few yards from where the idea of a community avowing Unitarian principles was born after the new minister appointed to the Castle Hill Meeting just over the road arrived determined to root out the liberal ideas and firmly instil due reverence for the principle of Trinitarianism. Those twelve first established themselves in the upper room of a public house that once stood where the new 'bus interchange has been built also not too far away.

To add to this we are even closer to the ancient Anglo-Saxon town centre than to our place of birth. This part of town is rich in Northampton's history.

Most of the work involved in changing Meeting has been done now. We have our folding partition so we can hire out the outer part and now we have a proper notice board just like a real place of worship. A few jobs are left to be done, but probably the most important is getting more people through our doors for whatever reason – more bums on seats, either worshipping with us or meeting here for various reasons. We must all work at this!

We potentially have a great future ahead, but it can't be done without involvement of all of us. So my message for the next year is get on with it! I think we can all be proud of what we have achieved over the last year. We are small, but we are growing, and what we have is quality!

**Jon Small (from Northampton newsletter)**

## Is Unitarianism A Faith?

As if a new year isn't enough of a challenge, we are now invited to consider the question "Is Unitarianism a Faith?" Clearly, the word "faith" is used here in a religious connotation, and it is this connection with religion that endows the word with seriousness when it is used in other contexts. We talk of having faith in political or ideological beliefs, in social convictions, or in some deeply held ideology. Now, this could be a very long drawn out reflection and we could spend serious amounts of time looking at the various unfamiliar words which are rendered into English as "faith". We'd soon uncover some key examples: *pistis*, *fidem*, *emunah*, *sraddha*, *iman*, and would quickly realise that "faith" is not understood in a uniformly explicit way across different traditions.

In religious orthodoxy (assuming there is such a thing, and I am increasingly sure there isn't much) the essential elements of faith seem to be summarised in structural, formal, perhaps creedal, outlines of belief. Even here, one knows that many loyal members of different churches quietly ignore some of their official teachings. How many committed Anglicans could really put a tick of affirmation next to all the statements of the Nicene Creed? However, beyond these systematic declarations of principle there is a deeper, almost ineffable, aspect of faith; obviously less prescribed, much more individual and often eccentric. It is innate - a state of the heart, characterised by assurance and conviction, not based on reason but potentially enhanced by it. For many of the faithful, conventional statements are perched, often precariously, over these private wells of spirituality. Faith is a mixture of the public and private, of emotion and reason, infinitely variable and nuanced. What it certainly isn't, is monolithic.

There is a whole psychology (based on the work of a certain James Fowler), which enumerates six stages in the development of faith. These range from the first, evident among young children, who are as yet unable to think abstractly but can be imaginatively involved in community rituals, to the final sixth level of "Universalising Faith". This last is a rare accomplishment. Effectively the highest stage for most people is the fifth, where the questioning is less unsettling, and greater calm prevails because the individual concerned has worked successfully through challenging problems and can accept that he or she won't find answers to everything. At this, penultimate, stage there is a recognition of the importance of community and openness to other faith perspectives which can deepen one's understanding. Reaching stage five sounds fine and sufficiently mature to me! For someone who accepts this idea of staged religious development, any claim to possess "complete" faith will smack of complacency and seem to be a premature declaration of final attainment. These stages allow space for that other bedfellow, doubt; Paul Tillich observed that doubt isn't the opposite of faith but rather an element of it.

Do you remember a common definition of faith, based on a text from Hebrews, along the lines of "belief in things unseen"? I immediately sense a collective discomfort and unease with the looseness of this definition. It's one that doesn't sit well with us as a group who, for all our internal differences, value reason as a guiding principle. While many of us will want to allow for more than can only be demonstrated or proved, we are aware that "blind" is an adjective frequently used before faith. Some theologians have wanted faith to be based on evidence, wanting it to be intelligent rather than blind, and the Greek "*pistis*" has the sense of persuasion because there is evidence. So, while faith may be rescued from blindness it remains a strong word, perhaps too strong for comfort. How about a trio of words? The following

three seem to me to be related in an ascending order of intensity: hope, trust and faith. Hope is what I wish for, trust elevates hope to a more confident state of expectation and faith is closer to certainty.

Faith seldom travels alone; I've just noted that one of its closest companions is trust. I find myself more ready to feel trust in someone or thing than admit to faith in them. I'm not quite sure why I make this distinction. It might be put down to previous experience. I can only think of two people I would describe as completely untrustworthy and in whom I could not possibly have either trust or faith. There again, I find it hard to use the one word without the other! Faith comes in graduated strengths and qualities, for example, strong or weak, complete or mature. I guess we want the option of qualifying the degree of faith that might be held, as in "I have no/little/some/great/complete faith (or trust) in the government's economic policy". Faith on its own seems more rigid, and less likely to admit the possibility of error or mutability. I immediately accept that both my trust or my faith can be misplaced or betrayed, but feel trust to be more finely tuned.

As I confront the specific question "Is Unitarianism a Faith?", I sense that that capital F transmutes faith into something more: a structure, a tradition, a set of teachings, a system with an emphasis on morality and ethics. It looks to me hard to say we aren't among the many faith traditions, but we participate on rather different terms. We are one of the more porous ones, our openness makes us less exclusive and rather more appreciative of other narratives. The ability to value our tradition without devaluing others, to find it right for us without making universal claims of absolute truth, the capacity to accept a variety of views held in creative tension (on good days!) and the absence of doctrine and dogma are some indicators of our distinctiveness.

So, maybe just for me, it's a word preference without much justification (as in practice faith and trust are used pretty much interchangeably), coupled with a willingness to accept Unitarianism as a Faith whilst sensing that many of our number would prefer another, less overtly religious, word. Tradition? Movement? Stop now, that's another discussion!

**Jane Couper**

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Faith beyond the Power of Reason

The classic definition of Christian faith appears in 11th chapter of the *Letter to the Hebrews* in the New Testament. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Many Christians draw a distinction between 'natural human faith' and 'faith in God'. The former includes things like faith in natural laws such as gravity and inertia, so that we can assume that they will not suddenly stop working, causing us all to fly off into outer space. And we trust that vegetables and animals and even, to some extent, human beings, will grow and behave in accordance with these natural laws.

But Christians believe that faith in God is a gift from God. So far as I, an outsider, understand it, the central requirement of becoming a Christian is to have faith in the fact the Jesus is your Saviour, who by his death on the cross somehow atoned for the sins of humankind, and enabled us to be reconciled to God. This was an unmerited gift from God, made by His grace, and the human part is to accept it with gratitude, and try to be worthy of it. It is not a path that most Unitarians can take.

And yet, Unitarianism is often spoken about by Unitarians as a "faith" rather than a "religion". In his book *The Unitarian Life*, Stephen Lingwood calls us "a faith community for those on a spiritual journey, for those who believe there is still more to be

discovered in religion. We believe in religious exploration - through the intellect and through the spirit. Through the intellect we explore religious questions in sermons, lectures, workshops, and dialogue. Through the spirit we explore through worship, music, ritual, meditation, and prayer."

I rather like his distinction between intellectual and spiritual exploration. For me, having faith involves trust, whether it is the "natural human faith" mentioned above, or faith in Someone or Something beyond the natural world. It is not the same as belief, which you can do with your intellect. It is not by accident that people speak of "a leap of faith" - it involves jumping into the unknown and trusting that you will be caught.

I appreciate that many Unitarians would not agree with this view, as they do not believe that there *is* Someone or Something beyond the natural world. But faith is, by its very nature, beyond the power of reason, something that can only be discerned with the heart, not the mind alone. And on those grounds, I, an individual Unitarian, have faith in the divine, the numinous, the sacred other.

Sue Woolley

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My gut feeling is that Unitarianism overall in its current pick and mix state is not a faith. It is a collection of disparate ideas, beliefs and congregations within which many people may find their own variety of faith. For a lot of people this is fine and a welcome change from the prescriptiveness of other religious denominations. However, we should bear in mind that a pick and mix approach may not be enough for some people who are seeking explicit guidance, direction, reassurance and hope from "Some Force Beyond Us". And no, I do not think we should overly worry too much about "What is faith?", "What is belief?"

**Lesley Harris**

## District Events

### MUA of Lay Preachers & Worship Leaders Spring Training Day How Unitarians Do Communion

**Workshop Leaders:** Revs. Ant Howe and Sue Woolley & Ms. Cressida Pryor

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

**When:** Saturday 4th March 2017

**Times:** 10.00 am - 3.45 pm (coffee/tea from 9.30 am)

**Cost:** FREE to MUA participants; £10 a head to others

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MUA Annual General Meeting

Guest Speaker: Rev. Danny Crosby,
Minister of Altrincham & Urmston

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

When: Saturday 25th March 2017

Times: 10.30 for 11.00 am - c.4.00 pm

Cost: £5.00 a head for buffet 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
Northampton	Unitarian Meeting House	10.30 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:

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

Third Sunday of the Month:

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

Last Sunday of the Month:

Banbury	Unitarian Fellowship	11.00 am
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MUA Congregations: Contact Details

Name	Contact	Details
Banbury	Michaela Heppingstall	heppingstall@googlemail.com
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Shrewsbury	Belinda Cousens	01743 718237 belindacousens@btinternet.com
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Name	Contact	Details
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Wolverhampton	Barbara Russell	01902 650168 barbara-russell @blueyonder.co.uk

Prayer by Maureen Killoran (adapted)

Spirit of Life and Love, endless mystery of life:
You are the music that sounded before our world was born,
sound and silence woven throughout the ages,
far beyond the most profound wisdom humanity has been able to touch.

Be with us, deepen our willingness to live without certainty;
to take the risks of living on the edges of our creativity;
to step beyond the boundaries of possibility and hope.

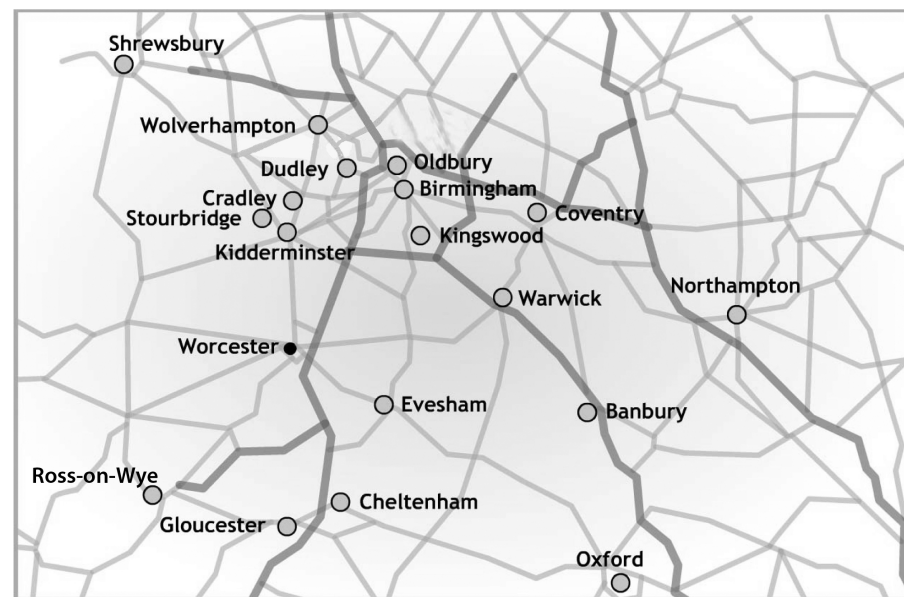
Help us always to remember that we are in our essence the magic of star stuff:
that we are kin to all that is and was and may yet come to be.

Teach us to temper our impatience, to retain our conviction that what we do makes a difference;
that even our smallest act can contribute to the good of a greater whole.

Be with us in our uncertainties. Rejoice with our small triumphs.

Comfort our losses. Remind us we are never alone, not in our joys or in our tears.

May we feel your presence, today and always. Amen



The Spring 2017 issue will be published in May.

**Please may we have your contributions on local matters,
& on the theme of "How can we make a difference?"**

by Friday 12th May 2017

Thank you!