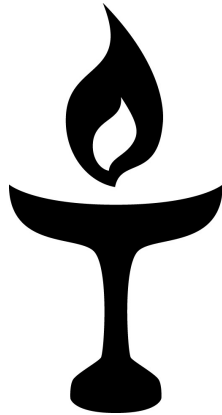


MU NOW



THE MAGAZINE OF THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

ISSUE 67

WINTER 2022 / 2023

www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk

Officers of the Midland Unitarian Association

THE PRESIDENT

Ms. Debra Burbery,
23a Ashford Way, Pontesbury, Nr. Shrewsbury SY5 0QT
Tel: 01743-792722 e-mail: debraburbery@yahoo.co.uk

VICE PRESIDENT

Ms. Cressida Pryor,
12, Cheltenham Road, Winchcombe, Glos. GL54 5ND
Tel: 01242-604120 e-mail: zenziallink@hotmail.com

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Ms. Diane Rutter,
2, Packhorse Cottage, Packhorse Lane, Hollywood B47 5DH
Tel: 0787-1215-920 e-mail: dianerutter2004@yahoo.co.uk

SECRETARY / DISTRICT MINISTER

Rev. Sue Woolley, BA, MPhil, Dip RS (Open), Cert.Min.
5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN
Tel: 01604-870746 e-mail: revsuewoolley@gmail.com

TREASURER

Mr Sandy Ellis. TD, BA, FCMA
The Hermitage, Sale Green, Nr. Droitwich, Worcs. WR9 7LN
Tel: 01905-391607 e-mail: sandyellis1932@gmail.com

AIMS OF THE MUA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Support congregations
- Make things happen by providing leadership and initiating projects
- Find resourceful solutions
- Connect Unitarians in the Midlands.

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From the Editor

Welcome to the Winter 2022/23 issue of *MU Now*. It includes a review of Daniel Costley's book, *Life's Journey: Creating Unitarian Rites of Passage* by Rev Peter Godfrey and some fascinating contributions on the theme, *My Ideal Day*, by Peter Godfrey, Dorothy Haughton, Alison Patrick and me.

And, for the first time in several issues, some District news! Thank you so much to Stourbridge and Warwick for providing some.

My thanks to everyone who contributed.

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.

The theme for the next issue, due out in January, is "Courage". The deadline for submissions is Friday 5th May 2023.

Please send your contributions to me at revsuewoolley@gmail.com or to 5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN.

THANK YOU!

Sue Woolley

President's Piece



This month, my ideal day would be that after a good night's sleep and a healthy breakfast I would go for a walk in the countryside and hope to see a few early hazel catkins and other hints of the spring to come. Then when at home, to sit and read a book that keeps me entranced, bathed in the winter sunshine for a while. What about

you?

What a year just gone – and that is it – it's gone – we can't change it and now we are venturing into a new one. The daylight is lengthening. Maybe 'resolutions' have started and not yet been forgotten or abandoned. Preparations and arrangements for the year ahead have been 'pencilled in' the new diary; seeds ordered for the garden; holidays planned – a time to look forward in earnest anticipation. For me what springs to mind is that last line in the carol *Joy to the World* – "Let peace and love and freedom reign" Let's all continue to strive to that end in this and in future years with hope in our hearts!

Love and best wishes to you all for 2023.

Debra Burbery

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## District Minister: Winter Update

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

## Leading worship around the Midland Unitarian Association:

Since the beginning of the first lockdown, I have been producing an online service for the District each week, which has been posted around by e-mail and also on the MUA website, and will be continuing to do this, now that we're all back to in-person services again. In spite of my Presidential duties, I have managed to lead a few services in the MUA and have booked three in each congregation for the latter part of 2023, once my Presidential role is done. I have also (sadly) conducted some funerals, including that of Audrey Green (see page 11).

The **Autumn Training Day**, on the theme 'Inspirational Collaboration', took place at Kingswood Meeting House, on Saturday 29th October, and went very well. We have booked Lizzie Kingston-Harrison, the General Assembly's Congregational Connections lead, to lead the 2023 **Spring Training Day**, on the topic of 'Vision, Change and Connection'. A flyer has been sent round to all congregations and I hope that many of you will be able to come. It is on Saturday 13th May, via Zoom.

**GA President:** I have continued to visit congregations all around the country, which has been fascinating. There is a separate article about my Presidential doings on page 7.

I am a fully qualified **spiritual director**. I offer direction sessions, on a one-to-one basis. Please contact me if you are interested.

**And if you are feeling alone and would like to hear another human voice, please feel free to give me a call on 01604 870746...**

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

## MUA Executive Committee Key Messages

The Key Messages from our September and November meetings have already been shared in the relevant issue of *Bits & Pieces*, the monthly news-sheet sent to all congregations. Those which are still current are reproduced below.

1 Card payment system for churches / chapels / meeting houses: Our Treasurer Elect, Kieren Mardle-Moss, has volunteered to run an MUA workshop on how to set this up. Watch this space!

2 National EC Link: Our new National EC Link is Rev Jo James of Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds.

3 2023 AGM: this will be taking place at The Great Meeting House Unitarian Church, Coventry, on Saturday 25th March. Please put the date in your diary. Our Guest Speaker will be announced soon.

Debra Burbery: tel: 01743-792722; [debraburbery@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:debraburbery@yahoo.co.uk)  
Sue Woolley: tel: 01604-870746; [revsuewoolley@gmail.com](mailto:revsuewoolley@gmail.com)

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GA President's Update

I had a pretty full-on couple of months in October and November, leading worship or fulfilling other duties every weekend. It began with attending a very pleasant lunch at Rivington, and delivered a toast to civil and religious liberty, which was very well received. The next day, I led worship at Ullet Road Church in Liverpool, which was a complete thrill, as not only my father, but also my grandfather and great-grandfather worshipped there.

The following weekend was spent in the north-east, leading worship at Newcastle upon Tyne and Stockton on Tees, followed by a return to the north-west on 16th October, when I led a Peace Service at Cross Street Chapel in Manchester and participated in a fascinating peace walk, led by Rev. Cody Coyne.

After Zooming into Edinburgh to lead worship there on 23rd October, I was closer to home on 30th, leading a service at Oxford. There was a good congregation, augmented by a visit from Stroud Unitarians and it was good to see old friends from the Oxford congregation once more.

On the first Saturday in November, I attended the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the building of Hinckley Great Meeting's Chapel and did a reading. But the following weekend was the most memorable. I did another Peace Service at Golder's Green Unitarians on Saturday 12th, before having the honour of representing the denomination at the Cenotaph on Sunday 13th, Remembrance Sunday. Which was an experience I will never forget. When Big Ben began to chime the hour, a total silence fell over the thousands of people there and the quiet was palpable. When the band next to the Cenotaph launched into *The Last Post*, I felt tears sting my eyes. It was a huge privilege to be there.

My final Presidential engagement of 2022 was to lead worship at Dukinfield in Cheshire. This was followed by three local services, within the MUA in December.

During the next three months, I will be visiting Padiham in Lancashire, York, Reading, Rochdale and Norwich (unless any more invitations arrive!). Then I will be chairing the General

Assembly meetings at Staverton, before handing on my medallion to the next President on 6th April.

Sue Woolley, President of the General Assembly

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### ***The Launching of MUA Inc by Sue Woolley***

As from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2023, the affairs hitherto managed by the Midland Unitarian Association Registered Charity 500925, have been transferred to the Midland Unitarian Association Incorporated Registered Charity No. 1200862 which was registered on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022.

This is the result of many months of hard work by our dedicated Treasurer, Sandy Ellis, who has had to deal not only with the Charity Commission (via solicitors) but has also had to fight long and hard with the bank to set up our new bank mandates.

The members of the MUA Executive Committee are most grateful for Sandy's hours of devoted work, which has made this change in our status possible.

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***Life's Journey: Creating Unitarian Rites of Passage* by Daniel Costley. Review by Peter Godfrey**

I remember when I was training for the ministry hearing a talk by a comedian, Tommy Trinder. He was discussing the funeral of a friend. Apparently the person conducting the ceremony had said nothing about the deceased during the service. Trinder said, "The minister had not done his homework."

In his Introduction to this excellent book the author, Rev. Daniel Costley, writes that "It is incumbent on celebrants, for whom this book was written, to be able to prepare and provide an excellent and tailored service, each and every time, and to ensure that they are not just going through the motions." This book is a wonderful help towards this end. I read it straight through with appreciation and enjoyment.

The book will be a very great help to any celebrant to do her/his homework. It springs from Daniel's experience as a Unitarian minister and includes material from a wide range of other experienced ministers. There are 'Top Tips' and 'Check Lists' for many of the rites of passage, for example child namings, weddings and funerals. These include 'Questions for a couple planning a wedding' and 'Practical issues for a couple to consider'.

The various rites are illustrated by case studies that people using this book will find helpful. One of them, 'Suicide by a Veteran', includes the phrase "He had committed suicide." I think that nowadays it is more correct to say, "Took his own life." Suicide should not be considered a criminal offence.

Daniel's sensitive approach to all rites of passage is well illustrated in his section on child namings. In this section he encourages celebrants to make sure everyone concerned knows the chosen names beforehand because "this is no time for springing surprises." There is a warning that "Things will go wrong – you are working with children.....laugh, smile, make a comment, and try to get back on track. People are very forgiving at child-naming ceremonies."

There is a comprehensive list of 'Further Resources' and a note about the use of recorded music in rites of passage.

The book is £12 plus postage from Unitarian HQ and Amazon.

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**District Round Up**

**The Funeral of Audrey Green at Stourbridge**

On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> January Rev. Sue Woolley conducted the funeral service for Audrey Green from the Stourbridge congregation. Audrey had sadly passed away in hospital on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2022 with double pneumonia. She was 92.

Audrey was born in Dronfield near Sheffield on 23rd July 1930. She moved with her family to the West Midlands in the 1950s. She began work with the local council, and later began training to become a librarian. For many years she worked at Stourbridge library as Music Librarian.

Audrey was an Anglican until 1990, attending St Mary's in Oldswinford. Then a friend, Herbert Mearman (father of the current organist, David), who was at that time organist at Stourbridge Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel, introduced her to Unitarianism and she became a member. Audrey was to remain a Unitarian for the rest of her days, serving as both Treasurer and Pulpit Secretary for many years.

Audrey and David Mearman were regulars at Midland Unitarian Association lunches. They also had close links with the Dudley, Oldbury and Wolverhampton congregations, who worshipped at the Old Meeting House in Dudley. Barbara Russell was a good friend to Audrey, and they were in regular touch by phone.



Audrey meeting Prince Charles in 2007; photographer unknown

One of the highlights of Audrey's time with Stourbridge Unitarians came in 2007. She and David had applied to the English Churches Preservation Trust for a grant to repair the chapel. At that time, Prince Charles was the Fund's President and invited all the congregations who had applied for a grant to a reception. Audrey was very thrilled to meet him, as you can see from the photo above.

In the last decade or so, Audrey suffered from ill health – she had polymyalgia rheumatica and undiagnosed Parkinson's disease. She became increasingly unable to care for herself and was fortunate to be surrounded by a network of kind friends, neighbours, and carers, who supported her in many ways – shopping, taking her to chapel, and later, when she became housebound, looking after her every need.



She was in constant pain from the polymyalgia rheumatica, and her mobility was seriously affected so that she had to use a wheelchair. Nevertheless, Audrey continued to attend worship services at both Dudley and Stourbridge until the beginning of lockdown in March 2020. Once lockdowns were lifted, Audrey returned to attending services again at Stourbridge, with the assistance of David Mearman and a local wheelchair taxi service.

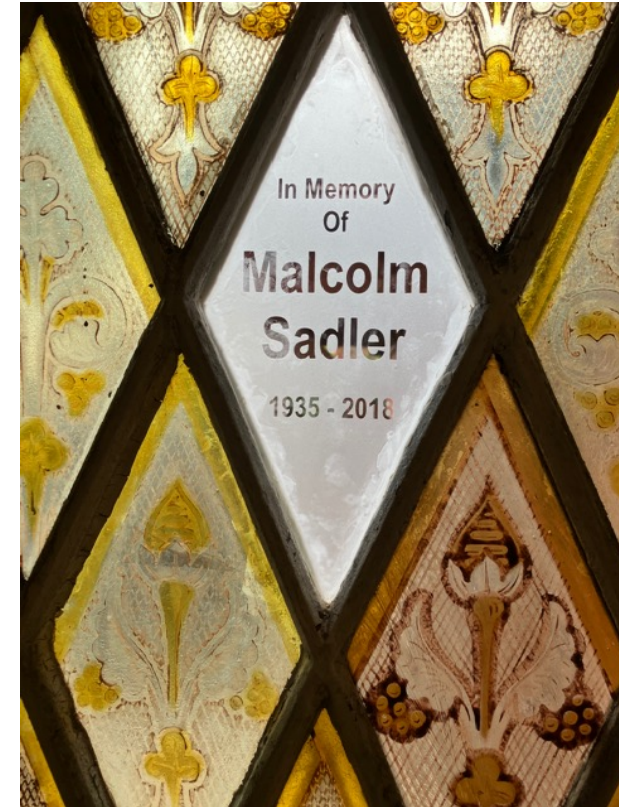
The funeral was attended by Audrey's many friends and neighbours, and was held at Stourbridge Unitarian church, before moving on to the local crematorium for the committal. The whole congregation and those attending the funeral agreed that Sue Woolley's service perfectly captured the quiet dignity that Audrey would have appreciated, and many present were moved to tears by Sue's insightful and heartfelt delivery, as MUA District Minister of many years. Audrey's favourite hymns and music were beautifully played by organist David Mearman. Audrey will be greatly missed by all who knew her.

**David and Carolyn Taylor, Stourbridge**

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Malcolm Sadler memorial at Warwick

After the death of Malcolm Sadler in 2018, the Warwick congregation decided to make a permanent memorial to him in the Chapel, which he had loved so dearly. As one of the windows needed a small new diamond shaped glass replacing in its centre, our Chairman Malcolm Burns set about finding a glass engraver. Eventually he managed to find a company who could engrave the glass with Malcolm's dates of birth and death, and also fit the glass.



The stained glass panel (photo by Elaine Nomura)

We also wanted to have a brass plaque fitted inside the Chapel with the words: "In loving memory of Malcolm Sadler, 1935 – 2018. He sustained this Chapel for nearly 60 years." Malcolm Burns was able to find a firm who could make and fit the plaque just as we wished.

The congregation are very happy to have a permanent record of Malcolm Sadler's long service and devotion to Warwick Unitarian Chapel. We dedicated the plaque during a service led by Diane Rutter.



Diane Rutter with Malcolm's plaque (photo by Elaine Nomura)

Elaine Nomura

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## **Piano Recital at Warwick Chapel**

Charles Matthews, the notable local pianist, accompanist and organist gave a piano recital on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> December in the Warwick Chapel. He had built a very interesting programme around the years 1722, 1822, 1922 and 2022, effectively covering the whole range of classical piano music from the earliest pianos (invented during Bach's lifetime though he wrote originally largely for early keyboard instruments) through to the contemporary Leamington composer, Howard Skempton, and a

couple of present day students at the Birmingham Conservatoire writing this year.

Charles gave our Yamaha a really good workout, demonstrating both ferocious musical lines and tunes of great sensitivity. The clarity of his finger work produced magical interpretations of the Bach *Preludes* and *Fugues*, with the fugal entries very clearly delineated, while the range of emotions in Schubert's wide-ranging *Fantasy in C major* ("The Wanderer" 1822) explored everything a fortepiano could do at the time. By the twentieth century there was much more rhythmic variety, well shown in Hindemith's 1922 *Suite* including ragtime as well as more reflective pieces. The 2022 contributions were less extensive and understandably more adventurous tonally. Imagine a piece called *Frustration* responding to the hazards of modern travel with lengthy security checks and missed flights.

Altogether it was a very entertaining and instructive programme, brilliantly performed. Charles will be back in April for another concert and I thoroughly recommend booking it in advance.

**Malcolm Burns**

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My Ideal Day

The theme of 'My Ideal Day' has proved a popular one. Here are four very different 'takes' on it...

Wendy Cope ends her poem 'The Orange' with the verse:

'The rest of the day was quite easy,
I did all the jobs on my list
And enjoyed them and had some time over.

I love you. I'm glad I exist'

As I began to get down to writing something on this subject, I was with members of my family the day after Boxing Day. After the festival days it was a working day even for a retired minister (just joking!). I was sitting very comfortably. I looked about me. Two family members (no names!) were asleep – in all honesty I had just woken from my afternoon nap. Two were preparing the table for *Monopoly* with neat piles of money, houses and hotels and street cards all in good order. Another was doing a newspaper crossword. It was an ideal setting. Not surprisingly I was dragged into the *Monopoly* game and looking back on the day, I would say it was 'ideal'.

Was it 'My Ideal Day'? This well-chosen subject set me thinking about the very many happy things that have occurred in my fortunate life. The result is that I think my final answer is that my ideal day is one when, at its end I settle down to sleep, and I have the awareness, the feeling, that I have done or experienced satisfactory and enjoyable things that I had meant do at the beginning of the day. The actual variety of things would have been very variable, complicated or simple, over the years. Also, that at the end of the day I have no undue worries about things done wrongly or leftover tasks that will somehow have to be fitted in tomorrow.

So, an ideal day may include very special events – family birthdays, holidays, good books read, and so on. Or an ideal day may be very simple – a short local walk during which there are lots of neighbours to chat to, a friendly game of bowls, a letter from or to an old friend. Wendy Cope – see above - knew about this sort of ideal day and her last line resonated for me. There were many days that were ideal for me because at the end of them

the last thing Sheila, my wife, and I said to one another was 'I love you'.

Peter Godfrey (Stroud)

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We are living back in Shropshire alongside the Montgomery Canal. We have had breakfast; Dave has gone off for a run and I have set off on my tricycle. The sun is shining but it is not too warm. All the birds are singing as am I. I have received emails from two distant friends with lots of lovely news and have discovered on Facebook that two more have had appointments with appropriate specialists and the prognosis is good. I am cycling into Oswestry where I shall call in at my favourite shops, sometimes just to say hello and catch up on the news. I meet up with a friend for coffee. This afternoon I shall do some more pottering about in the garden. I have some new plants to put in bought from a lovely nearby nursery garden. Then I shall do a bit more work on my service for Sunday, read my book and then make dinner. After dinner I drive off to Theatre Severn in Shrewsbury. We (Mary's choir) are singing in a production of *Silhouette*, written by a local playwright about the local lingerie factory, now sadly, no longer extant. Home, coffee, a bit of television watching then off to bed. Half an hour with our books then light off and goodnight.

I really need two Ideal Days...

I am living in Bedfordshire and am a member of Bedfordshire Lace Ladies' Morris. (There was discussion about that but we liked the alliteration). So the second is a Day of Dance round Shrewsbury with visiting Morris teams, dancing in the town square and outside any pub that will have us. This starts c. 10.00,

breaks for lunch and finishes when it is too dark to dance anymore or when the lure of the pub has become irresistible.



Dorothy Morris dancing (photographer unknown)

### **Dorothy Haughton (Shrewsbury)**

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On my ideal day I get up early
after a lie-in.
I make tea, take it back to bed
and read.
And see the sun rise from the river.
We sit in a diamond frost which lifts
off the water, comes up in sparkles,
then we race an eight down Laundry Straight

to Woppy's Bend which we take
without having
to stop.

On my ideal day, I go to church.
It's nearly full.
We sing my favourite hymns,
all thirty-two of them, and someone behind
sings harmony, perfectly in tune.
After the excellent sermon, which I remember,
perfectly,
five people volunteer for the committee
and there are custard creams
and proper coffee.

On my ideal day, I have hours and hours.
To climb a mountain,
a small one, and wander back down through
green pastures where there are
no cows.
Or if there are cows,
they are in the other fields looking picturesque,
or if they are in my fields,
I stroll confidently through,
not muttering under my breath,
not planning my escape via
barbed wire fence and hedge,
and the cows look on in awe
at my courage and nonchalance.

On my ideal day we walk along the brook.
There are millions of snowdrops.
At the end of the walk,
a stall with second-hand books.

You find some loose change in your pocket.
Just enough.

On my ideal day I have a poem published.
And write another one.

On my ideal day I see a kingfisher,
a meteor shower, a waxwing.
England beat Australia in the Test.
Russia makes peace with Ukraine.

On my ideal day which might, after all,
be the day following my ideal day,
I sit with my beloveds and reflect
on these things
and am content.

Alison Patrick (Shrewsbury)

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The first century BCE Roman poet, Horace, once wrote, “The ideal day will never come. It is today, if we make it so.”

Which made me think about what my own ideal day might look like. I would wake up early, naturally, not through an alarm. The weather would be warm and sunny – perfect for taking a walk in Salcey Forest – see photo on next page. So I would do my morning sit (a time of stillness and prayer, using my Unitarian prayer beads) and then head out into the Forest’s natural beauty, which would have its usual effect of lifting my mood and nourishing my soul.



Refreshed, I would come back and write my Morning Pages before settling down to do some writing. I have a lovely writing desk in one corner of my bedroom, where I can write in peace – such a blessing. And because this is my ideal day, the words would come easily and I would complete the latest scene for my novel, full of vivid colour and detail.

Then I would walk back downstairs and do whatever work needed doing, being fully present to the needs of the day. After which, I would be free to spend time on my latest crochet project. At the moment, I’m working on a gorgeous blanket, which I’ve just begun and it is fascinating to see the wool turning into beautiful, delicately coloured roses. Creating something new and original, whether it is a blanket, a cross-stitch sampler, a scene in a novel, a worship service (at least the address part), a blogpost (or an article for *MU Now*!) is such a joy.

Reading would have to be part of my ideal day. I *always* have a book on the go, whether it is a fiction title on my Kindle, or a non-fiction book about religion, spirituality or the craft of writing.

It would not be an ideal day for me if I did not spend at least some of it curled up with a book.

Seeing the people I love happy is a key component of my own happiness. I cannot truly be happy if somebody I care about is miserable, for any reason. I just can't. I am finding that as I get older, my circle of compassion is widening, which makes me increasingly restless about other people's unhappiness. Which is why feeling that I may be able to make a small difference in the world also has a role to play in my ideal day. There is so much to do, and each one of us is so small and insignificant, but as the title of my Unitarian blog says, "Still I Am One."

So, during the day, I would hear that the Russians have withdrawn from the Ukraine and that the United Nations has launched two initiatives, one to end world poverty and the other to combat climate change, and that all the countries of the world had signed up to both. (well, I can dream...)

In the evening, pleasantly tired, I would sit with my husband in the lounge, watching a programme we both enjoy, with the cat purring on my lap. When I went upstairs, I would give thanks for all these things (I record the small pleasures of the day in my bullet journal) and for life in all its marvellous, messy, chaotic imperfection. Just being grateful for my life, joys and sorrows together, would make a perfect closing to my ideal day. Then I would relax in a nice warm bath before retiring to bed with a good book.

I count myself so blessed, that this ideal day is often a truth (except for the good news about the wider world) rather than an ideal. **Sue Woolley (MUA)**

## **Forthcoming MUA Events**

### **MIDLAND UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION AGM**

**When:** Saturday 25th March 2023

**Where:** The Great Meeting House Unitarian Church,  
116 Holyhead Road, Coventry CV1 3AE

**Times:** 10.30 for 11.00 am to 4.00 pm

**Guest Speaker:** To be confirmed

This is your chance to influence the work and direction of your District Association.

### **MIDLAND UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION OF LAY PREACHERS AND WORSHIP LEADERS SPRING TRAINING DAY**

#### **Vision, Change and Connection**

**Course Leader:** Lizzie Kingston-Harrison,  
the General Assembly's Congregational Connections Lead

**When:** Saturday 13th May 2023

**Where:** via Zoom, from the comfort of your own home

**Times:** 10.30 am to 3.00 pm

Please let Rev Sue Woolley know if you are planning to attend either of these events (contact details on inside front cover)

## MUA Congregations: Times of Services

**This list shows when our Unitarian congregations in the Midlands meet for worship. But please contact the congregation before travelling, in case they are no longer accurate.**

### 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 |
| Kingswood               | Meeting House                | 11.00 am |
| Shrewsbury              | Unitarian Church             | 11.00 am |
| Warwick                 | High Street Chapel           | 4.30 pm  |

### First Sunday of the Month:

|                   |                         |          |
|-------------------|-------------------------|----------|
| Northampton       | Unitarian Meeting House | 11.00 am |
| Stroud Fellowship | The Exchange, Stroud    | 3.00 pm  |

### Second Sunday of the Month:

|             |                                   |          |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Coventry    | Gt Meeting House Unitarian Church | 11 am    |
| Cradley     | Park Lane Unitarian Chapel        | 6.30 pm* |
| Stourbridge | Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel   | 11.00 am |

### Third Sunday of the Month:

|             |                         |          |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------|
| Northampton | Unitarian Meeting House | 11.00 am |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------|

### Fourth Sunday of the Month:

|             |                                   |          |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Coventry    | Gt Meeting House Unitarian Church | 11 am    |
| Stourbridge | Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel   | 11.00 am |

\*currently in abeyance

## MUA Congregations: Contact Details

| Name                    | Contact           | Details                                         |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Birmingham              |                   | unitariannewmeetingbirmingham@yahoo.co.uk       |
| Cheltenham & Gloucester | Alison Thursfield | 01242 254825<br>thursfieldalison@gmail.com      |
| Coventry                | Francesca Rogers  | info@coventryunitarians.org.uk                  |
| Cradley                 | Sheila Powell     | perconicous24@yahoo.co.uk                       |
| Evesham                 | Lesley Harris     | 01242 573927<br>agonoid@gmail.com               |
| Kingswood               | Maria Govier      | 07816-159199<br>maria.heath@icloud.com          |
| Northampton             | Aleks Zglinska    | 07970-785159<br>aleks.zglinska@gmail.com        |
| Shrewsbury              | Fiona Checkley    | 07487 531 913<br>shrewsburyunitarians@gmail.com |
| Stourbridge             | David Mearman     | 01384 376478<br>davidmearman@hotmail.com        |
| Stroud                  | Pam Jenkinson     | 07776 276276<br>pam.jenkinson58@gmail.com       |
| Warwick                 | Elaine Nomura     | 01926 611964<br>emtnomura@aol.com               |



**The Spring 2023 issue will be published in May.**

**Please may we have your contributions on local matters,  
and on the theme of “Courage ”**

**by Friday 5th May 2023**

**Thank you!**