

MU NOW



THE MAGAZINE OF THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

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From the Editor

Welcome to the Spring 2015 issue of *MU Now*. As ever, plenty has been happening within the District since the last issue.

As I mentioned in the last issue, 2016 is the **Sesquicentenary (150th Anniversary) of the foundation of our District Association**. We would like to celebrate it in some special way, and are starting to think about it now, as these things need a lot of advance planning. Please send any ideas to me, at the address / e-mail address below.

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!

As you can see from the above, I have a new e-mail address; this is because my old internet service provider decided to stop supporting domestic e-mails. I was lucky to have managed to get myself such a memorable new one! Please update your records.

Taking up the challenge issued by the National EC at the General Assembly meetings, **the theme for the next issue is "Our Vision for the Future"**, and the deadline for submissions will be **Monday 3rd August 2015**.

Sue Woolley



President's Piece



As I sit down to contribute my first President's Piece it's the day after our Midland Unitarian Association AGM – it's all so new I haven't yet decided upon the safe, remembered place where I have been advised to keep the President's insignia!

The first thing I need, and want to do, is to pay tribute to Ash for his tremendous leadership during his two years as our President. He brought a fresh eye and, with his relaxed style, proved energetic, enthusiastic and inclusive in leadership, able to encourage without pressurising and to see the humour in it all. He has more than earned our respect, gratitude and, above all, affection. We are fortunate to retain his skills for another period on the Executive Committee.

The theme of this first 2015 issue of *MU Now*, "Growth and Springtime" is curiously appropriate for me. I was born a Winter baby (indeed, a snow baby) but Spring is my preferred time, I think I was born a season premature! In my mind there is that full on picture perfect calendar ideal of Spring displayed in a gloriously colourful earth set against its heavenly backdrop of bright blue sky with fluffy, unthreatening, clouds. This is the picture that sustains us during the last tiring days of Winter when our spirits burn low as the grip of cold darkness and drear seem unending. But what we actually start with is smaller. Smaller, but essential; hope is in the air. Hope, as we sniff out the first tiny signs of seasonal movement. The word is literally "sniff" because we can scent the change as those first tiny signs of welcome growth appear. These first fruits of hope confirm that the year is moving on, just as they confirm and remind us of our creaturely

status: we can neither speed up the coming of Spring nor slow it down. It may be early or late, wet or dry, wet or windy, dry or bright, March winds and April showers but Spring will come in its own time.

All seasons have qualities which resonate with our inner lives; each offers a focus and the yearly cycle keeps us both anchored and prepared to accept the changes that they inherently bring. That change is inevitable, natural and enlivening for us; and at this time of the year our spirits soar with the increased light, energy and colourful freshness. Again we need patience, not the patience of endurance but of expectation. After the watching and waiting, growth is on the way and those special flashes of glory will make hearts sing. Even so, our realism and experience remind us that, just as we enjoy the revival, we also have to deal with the weeds that survived the winter and now put on their growth spurt!

Thinking of growth, my mind turns to the hope we have for growth in our movement. This is unlike nature's Spring, it won't come unless we do something to encourage it. We need to be as the gardener who labours in all seasons to foster and enhance the quality of the garden. The gardener can't make the Spring but acts as midwife to it. There are already welcome signs that we are ready to embrace some changes and new ideas which may stir us to fresh vision and openness as we tend our beloved patches. It isn't always easy to do this but change and development are integral to progress. We need to face this truth with courage and be willing to see where our usual ways have not enabled us to welcome as many people as we'd like. Can I urge you to ensure your own patch is represented at the Spring Training to be held on April 25th? It will give us a great opportunity to share in a workshop on growth and community action (led by Rob Gregson of Simple Gifts) which is designed to help us look outwards and

contribute that bit more effectively. So, let's follow the season and spring into action together!

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

MUA District Minister: Spring Update

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

I am now in my fourth year as **Minister of the Banbury Unitarian Fellowship**. As the warmer weather begins, we are hoping that more members will be able to get to church.

Leading worship around the Midland Unitarian Association: My diary for 2015 is now full - I am leading worship somewhere near you practically every Sunday between now and the end of next year. I will be doing a multiple naming ceremony (three children in the same family) in May, at Coseley Old Meeting.

Our **Spring Training Day**, on the topic *The Road Ahead*, will have taken place by the time you hold this magazine in your hands. Led by Rob Gregson and Ann Howell of Simple Gifts, I hope it will have inspired members of MUA congregations to become involved in social action in your own areas.

In 2015, the District is running the nationally-recognised **Rites of Passage Foundation Course**, at Kingswood. The first session, on Weddings, led by Rev. Martin Whitell, will be on Saturday 9th May; the second, on Naming, led by Rev. Lynne Readett in July; and the third, by Rev. Ant Howe, on Funerals, in September. The final session, when participants will be putting what they have learned into practice, will be taking place in November. More details from me or your congregational Secretary.

In October, I started on the **Encounter** course, which is a three-year training course, leading to a qualification in spiritual direction. I'm now coming up to the end of my first year, and it has been a rich and fulfilling experience. I'm really looking forward to Years 2 and 3!

Sue Woolley, District Minister, Midland Unitarian Association

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## MUA Executive Committee Key Messages

The Key Messages below, from our November 2014 and February 2015 meetings have already been published in *Bits & Pieces*. So only those which have not been overtaken by events are published here. Also, a couple of announcements from the AGM.

### November 2014:

1. MU Now: Jenny Buckland of Cheltenham & Gloucester has finally stood down from her role as distributor of the District magazine. The Committee wishes to place on record our thanks for her sterling work over the years, both as distribution coordinator, and earlier, as Joint Editor.

### February 2015:

1. Rev Sue Woolley: now has Full status on the Unitarian Roll of Ministers.

### Annual General Meeting:

1. Oxford: We are sad to report that the Oxford congregation have decided to move from the MUA to join the London & District Provincial Assembly. We wish them well.
2. Vice President: Diane Rutter of Kingswood is our new Vice-President.
3. Hail and Farewell: We said goodbye and thank you to three members of the Executive Committee: Mrs. Bronwen Taylor and

Mrs. Alison Thursfield, both Past Presidents of the District, and Mr. Robin Hanford, all left the Committee. We welcome three new members: Mrs. Lesley Harris of Evesham; Ms. Cressida Pryor of Cheltenham & Gloucester; and Mr. David Wood, of Shrewsbury.

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

## The Midland Unitarian Association at the Unitarian General Assembly Meetings 2015

*A good spread of Unitarians from MUA congregations attended this year's General Assembly meetings at the Hilton Metropole near the NEC, on the outskirts of Solihull. Some reports are below:*

### The 2015 GA - a Report

The idea of a near septuagenarian attending his first GA does seem a bit unlikely, but then I'm a latecomer to Unitarianism. I didn't know quite what to expect when I set out for the Birmingham Hilton Metropole on Sunday, 29<sup>th</sup> March.

I emerged into the sunlight three days later, older and wiser. I now know what happens at the GA.

Around 300 delegates and seven plenary sessions for a start, with some impassioned debates on the TTIP, the Trans-Atlantic Trade & Investment Partnership - passed; Community Cohesion - lost; Dr Hadwen Trust, supporting non-animal medical research - passed; and payment of organists and others who play for our services - passed. Interestingly, by far the closest vote came after the debate on that last motion, with 47 delegates voting against

the idea that there should be some guidelines for the payment of organists. No such dissension on the Stipend Review Committee's recommendation that the stipend for Worship Leaders be increased to £50!

Then there were the eight small group 'breakout' sessions – with four different ones to choose from each time. It was often difficult to choose as there was more than one which I'd have liked to attend – but a choice had to be made. Particularly enjoyable was Ben Whitney's talk in the NUF (National Unitarian Fellowship) session. I can thoroughly recommend his new book *Updating the Map – A Humanist Journey Through The Bible* [2015]. The GA's keynote speaker, Rev Jill McAllister, led a great workshop on 'Multiculturalism' which certainly made me think about how easy it was to hold preconceptions unconsciously which cause me to say 'you're wrong' – when what I mean is, 'you hold a different truth'.

I attended the Associate Members' and *The Inquirer's* Receptions – of course, nothing to do with the glass of wine on offer at them! I enjoyed the talk on religious education given by Shaykh Muhammad Amin Evans, a Shi'ite Muslim, at the Ministry Strategy Group's session. I joined the UCA (Unitarian Christian Association) at their book launch (*Our Christian Faith*) and learned a lot at the 2020 Group's workshop on '10 ways to help your congregation grow'. My own congregation at Shrewsbury Unitarian Church will be hearing a lot more about these over the next 12 months.

Then there was the worship. I confess that I was disappointed in the two evening services which all delegates attended. The first was the Anniversary Service on Sunday and the second, 'Celebrating our Vision' on Monday. The latter was two hours long and far too wordy – and delivered in too deliberate a tone.

The initial excitement of the procession of banners while singing "Open the door, step right inside" was lost for me in what followed. In huge contrast were the Morning Worship sessions. Perhaps because they started at 7.30am and were smaller and quieter, they were infinitely more inspiring and uplifting. Rev. Cliff Reed led the first on the theme 'Holy Week, Holy City'. Excerpts from Cliff's Holy Land trip journal with Bible readings and music were wonderful. The David Olney song 'Jerusalem Tomorrow' sung by Emmylou Harris, a revelation. Tuesday's service, led by Rev. Matthew Smith, on the subject of immigration, contained the fabulous poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians' by Constantine Kavafy. Matthew was joined by Rev. Jo James to read this. Finally, on Wednesday, came the highlight of the GA for me. A Socinian Communion Service, led by Rev. Kate Whyman. Not space here to tell you about the Socinians (look them up) but the words used were simple and extremely moving. When she broke the loaf she said: "Bread is for breaking, not bodies or hearts", and when pouring the wine: "Wine is for spilling not blood or tears." We sat at the table in twelves – the day before Maundy Thursday. A wonderful start to the final day.

Finally, I met so many Unitarians from around the country and talking to them between sessions and at mealtimes was extremely valuable to me as a newcomer to the denomination (can I call it that?). I was able to learn from their experience, and particularly how often they had any sort of communion and how they conducted it. The whole experience of attending the 2015 GA will stand me in great stead in my own leading of worship, and I look forward to going again another year.

**David Wood, Shrewsbury Unitarian Church**

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Gatecrashing the GA Anniversary Service

It's such a good opportunity; not to be missed. This year the GA was only an hour up the road so we could get up there and back in an evening for the opening service and thus experience the first expression of its' 2015 being... so three of us drove into the Hilton car park with the excitement of school children on a day away from class! All of the fun and none of the responsibility of being official attendees.

Arriving at the huge hotel, with delegates already moving around purposefully with their lanyards and labels, started off the 'us and them' feeling. My unruly inner teenage self always up for the 'value added' experience soon sniffed out the large room hosting the different Unitarian Societies' stands. Now virtually empty as everyone settled themselves into the dining room for supper we moved around the stalls with the quiet grace offered to few. Last year when I was Bayshill's official delegate I knew that this room, alive with the buzz of the fair, was one of the affirming experiences of GA attendance. Cruising the many, now abandoned stalls immediately emphasised the diversity of this movement... I hoovered up badges to spread around my congregation ('Proud to be a Unitarian' and 'the Church of the Open Mind') posting my money in the recommended pot I hasten to add...and dallied around the Psychic Society's stall, amongst others.

Then the naughty thought entered my mind...this is the chance to say hello to folk seen in other settings...and they're all sitting down for dinner...so after the room of stalls the three of us crept around the dining room accosting known folk sitting at tables...another opportunity not to miss!

And this was all before the service. And that's another story, another time.

Except to quote Mark M. De Wolfe's words from one of the hymns sung with such gusto:

"Look, within, your soul's the kindling of the fire our forbears knew. Find the spirit, always restless, find it in each mind and heart. Touch and hold that ancient yearning, kindling for a new found truth."

My worry is, if we don't share this truth with the wider public what is the future of this wonderful movement?

Cressida Pryor, Cheltenham

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## A Vision for Our Future - A Reflection

This year's GA meetings were the usual rich mix of plenary meetings, fringe meetings and workshops, and wonderful worship. They are a time for catching up with old friends, for meeting new ones, and for gaining new insights into the way our denomination survives and thrives.

Generally, (I have to confess) I find the Plenary (or business) meetings fairly tedious. As a minister and voting member of the Assembly, I attend them all, but listening to reports from various worthy Unitarian bodies is not my idea of fun or even interesting, most of the time. I know they are necessary, and vital parts of the General Assembly's work as a democratic body, and I don't see any other way of doing it, but, it's not generally riveting listening.

But this year, in the packs we had been given on arrival, was a 48-page document called *A Vision for Our Future*. There had been a Vision Day at Cross Street Unitarian Chapel back in September

2014, which I had attended, and which had produced some exciting ideas. Robert Ince, who is Convenor of the Executive Committee, presented this document to the Assembly, as part of the Executive Committee's Annual Report.



And it is really, really rich. The ideas of the Vision Day participants have been collated under three headings: "We want to be ....", "We must ....", and "To do this, we need to ....". They are included below. And then the EC has commissioned nineteen articles, by various Unitarian luminaries, both ministerial and lay, giving their "takes" on these ideas. Many of these have already been published, in either *The Inquirer* or *The Unitarian*. But seeing them altogether in one place really adds to their impact, in my opinion. Each one of them is inspirational. Together, they are a clarion call for action.

**"We want to be .....**

- A faith that matters
- A reflection of the world's complexity, bound together by our many different views
- A spiritual feast for each person to bring and share ideas and experience
- A promoter of social justice for all, listening and responding to the needs of others
- There for everyone

**We must .....**

- Tell the world we're here
- Be understood by the public
- Connect to people everywhere
- Serve our communities
- Develop personal leadership
- Be religiously literate
- Provide Ministry that enables ministry
- Prepare for our children's future

**To do this, we need to .....**

- Harness our energy
- Use our resources to the full
- Embrace new technology
- Acknowledge contribution and success
- Empower individuals
- Make change happen"

In the introduction to the document, Robert Ince writes: "This vision, though created with a view to the Unitarian Movement nationally, applies just as easily to Districts and congregations. ... it can become a uniting factor in our search for a better future. We all hope that it will serve to inspire those many individuals who love our Movement so deeply to join together in serving by whatever means they are able."

Let us, in the Midland Unitarian Association and its member congregations, resolve to not just read this document and nod our heads approvingly, and then do nothing. Let us Do Something about this. Read the articles, discuss them amongst ourselves, and then decide what we can do to make the ideas in them a reality.

**Sue Woolley, MUA District Minister**

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*One of the Break-out Sessions at the Meetings was that of the Ministers' Pension Fund. Our Treasurer, Sandy Ellis, was in attendance, and has some **important information for all MUA Treasurers**, whose congregations employ anybody.*

How the changes in the Rules about Ministers' Pensions and the introduction of the new Automatic Enrolment Private Pension Scheme will affect Ministers and Congregational Treasurers

The Ministers' Pension Fund

In late March, as a Treasurer paying a Minister, I received a letter from the Ministers' Pension Fund - the MPF - with some startling news. Historically, the Ministers' Pension Scheme has always not 'contracted out' of the two State Pension Schemes i.e. the ones paid for out of the National Insurance contributions made by both the Minister/Lay Pastor and the Congregation. This meant that when the Minister/Lay Pastor retired, he/she drew a Basic State Pension and a second State Pension plus his/her MPF Pension. However, starting in April, 2016, the two existing State Pensions will be combined into a single flat-rate Pension.

For complicated reasons relating to the above change in State Pensions, the MPF cannot continue on the same basis as before, and has therefore recommended to its members that the MPF Scheme in its present form, should cease as at April, 2016, with all the benefits earned up until then, preserved. It will then immediately start a new MPF Scheme, still on a simple and fair Final Earnings Basis and still not contracted out. Full details will doubtless be explained by the MPF to the members, but the important point to note is that the value of the Minister's MPF final pension will be broadly as it was before these changes.

The Automatic Enrolment Private Pension Scheme

Also in late March, I received a letter from the office of the State Pension Regulator about the new Automatic Enrolment Private Pension Scheme, demanding the contact details of the person paying the Minister, on threat of a financial penalty if I did not supply them. It explained that it had set up a 'Staging date' – in my case 31st March, 2016 – by which I had to consult the Minister/Lay Pastor/Other workers and the Congregational Managers, and make all the arrangements to select a Pension Provider so that I could start making the additional contributions by both the Minister/Lay Pastor/Other Workers and the Congregation, starting in April 2016. In the meantime, the Regulator would contact me at regular intervals to ascertain progress and provide additional advice.

If this has not already happened to you, it will do so shortly. I make no claim to be a Pension Expert and this article does not attempt to explain all of the complexities of the new pension arrangements, about which the GA plans to circulate advice. My aim is merely to provide a simplified explanation of the main ways in which these changes will affect you.

From April, 2016, you and your Minister/Lay Pastor/Other Workers - unless he/she/they choose to opt out - will be contributing to THREE Pension Schemes:

1. The Flat Rate State Pension Scheme: by paying National Insurance to the State
2. The New Automatic Enrolment Private Pension Scheme: by paying contributions to your chosen Pension Provider
3. The MPF Scheme: by paying contributions to the MPF

Although the New Automatic Enrolment Private Pension Scheme starts of with modest contributions of 1% each by the Minister/Lay Pastor/Other Workers and the Congregation, these escalate so that by October, 2018 the combined contributions payable to the MPF and the New Automatic Enrolment Private Pension Scheme, will be:

Ministers: 15%

Congregations: 13%

AND not only may the Contributions to the New Automatic Enrolment Private Pension Scheme **increase** in later years, but, although no increase in the 10% rate of MPF contributions is at present envisaged by the Trustees, it cannot be definitely ruled out eventually, because that Scheme is still under-funded, so the above figures represent **minimum** contributions..

The Government is so determined to make sure that every eligible person **does** join the new Automatic Enrolment Private Pension Scheme, that you are **obliged** to choose a Pension Provider for the Automatic Enrolment Scheme, to set up a scheme, to enrol your Minister/Lay Pastor and any other paid workers and to start paying contribution from 1st April, 2016, **even if the Minister/Lay Pastor/Other Workers may have already decided to opt out** and subsequently do so. In which case, he/she/they may opt out in April, 2016 and the contributions will be refunded. It seems that the most appropriate Pension Provider to choose, will be the National Employment Savings Trust – (NEST) which charges 1.8% of all contributions plus a management fee of 0.5% per year of the total value of the fund to administer it. An alternative for other paid workers, might be a qualifying Personal Pension Scheme which exempts the Employer from automatic enrolment. The MPF is not a qualifying scheme and so membership of it does not exempt congregations from their automatic enrolment obligation.

Regardless of whether you agree with this very bureaucratic and heavy handed approach, it is important to complete all of your arrangements in good time so that your payroll and other arrangements are ready to start deducting and remitting the new contributions from next April onwards, even although this will prove to be very short-lived if the Minister/Lay Pastor/Other Employees opt out in April. The State Pension Regulator will be providing advice about how to do most of this work on-line, so I hope you have a good internet connection! You must also give thought to how your congregation plans to meet the extra cost if and when this occurs.

One final, but important point: Ministers have the **RIGHT** to choose to opt out of the Automatic Enrolment Scheme. But Congregations **DO NOT** have a choice and it is **ILLEGAL** for a Congregation to try to persuade their Minister to opt out. So if your Minister says to you ‘Why should I pay an additional 5% - which I can ill afford – when my MPF and State Pension rights will remain very much as they were before ?’, you are forbidden to offer advice, so your recommended response would be ‘You might very well think that; I couldn’t possibly comment!’

Sandy Ellis, MUA Treasurer, 2nd April 2015

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*Towards the end of the Annual Meetings, four members of the Executive Committee retired, and two new ones took up their roles. Our own Alison Thursfield, of Cheltenham & Gloucester, was one of the retiring members, and below, she reflects on her time as a member of the EC.*

### **Thoughts about serving on the National EC**

First: how did I come to be on the National Executive Committee?? Really it was a direct result of being on the MUA Executive, and being President. The then EC Link suggested I

stand for the National committee – but I wasn't elected. End of story, I thought, but the following year there was a need to co-opt someone, so again it was suggested I let my name go forward, and I was co-opted, to be elected the following election.

### **What does the General Assembly (GA) do?**

Basically, it brings Unitarians together – gives a critical mass, makes things happen. Our existence is now known in Parliament through things like the Assisted Dying debate, and before that the Same Sex Marriage Bill, in both cases we worked with the Quakers and the Liberal Jews. Great external publicity for the movement!

Within the movement the GA organises, for example, the training of ministers, other training and facilitation events, youth work, safeguarding, CRB checks, leaflets & publications, the Annual Meetings etc. For all our work we need funds, so setting the quota is important. I must point out that we are currently living beyond our means as we are reliant on the Bowland Fund which doubles all our live giving. **Could we accept a doubling of the quota when Bowland stops??** [emphasis mine, Ed.]

The GA Executive members are Trustees for the movement, and also for some other groups like the Nightingale Centre and the 2020 Project.

So we need to be aware of, and manage, risk: this includes the possibility of a terrorist attack on the Law Courts; the event of bad publicity (hence the emphasis on safeguarding); coping with the lack of volunteers in every part of the movement; the dearth of funds to finance what the movement wants done – the list goes on and on.

Lots of intense discussions result and sometimes it is hard to see the way forward. When we advise the level for ministerial stipends we get flack from some churches who don't think they should be asked to pay that much! We need a radical change within the movement to money! We need realistic giving.

When I joined the EC we were starting a series of discussions on 'Difficult Choices' based on questionnaires returned by members on what they saw as priorities in our activities. This had been triggered by the lack of funds to support the old Commissions and Panels and the need to focus our activities and reduce costs. Our solution at the time was Strategy Groups, defined by the priorities as given in the questionnaire. There was a 5 year period for these groups, and with another year to run, the focus now is on how to follow on.

We admit that the Strategy Groups have not been a complete success partly because new strategies have not been developed (except to some extent in the Ministry Group), but it has been a continuum of the old thinking and the assumption that everything could be funded. We do need to focus on the way forward and develop new initiatives to generate 21<sup>st</sup> Century growth, within budget. Ideally we need to find ways of increasing the budget. (NB How does the quota compare with subs eg to Golf Clubs?)

The way we approached the challenge of our future was to hold our Vision Day last September – a lot of very useful and challenging ideas came from that, and we will be reporting at the GA meetings on some of them. But the EC can't wave a magic wand and have answers to all our problems. Every Unitarian needs to get involved and back us – remember, we are all volunteers too!

## How does the EC work?

I've indicated that we have serious and difficult choices to discuss and problems to solve. The only reason we can get anywhere is that we meet using engagement group principles both in ethos and format (look that up on the website). This means everyone has the opportunity to contribute, and is listened to; we have a genuine give and take of ideas; we work towards consensus rather than conformity, which often means compromise; and we observe confidentiality about our discussions.

The EC has been criticised for being secretive, but a lot can't be shared in detail so the Key Messages indicate the direction of discussions, and minutes are available later. Also the President is now invited to all meetings as an observer, and may be asked to contribute.

We have tried to develop the Links with Districts and other bodies: but that is supposed to be a two way dialogue, with the Districts feeding back the thinking of the congregations, so ideas pass both ways. I've had dealings with the MDMA (as Link) and the SUA (in *fm*) as well as MUA. There has been criticism of the EC because the direct representation of the old Council has been lost. I would comment that the MUA really co-opts people onto the Executive – so the same criticism can be applied as some congregations don't have direct representation, and some too much. The MDMA & SUA send a representative from each congregation.

The EC has been pilloried for continuing face-to-face meetings, not going to Skype or conference calls. This is deliberate. We did try Skype for a meeting, but people going off to put the kettle on, then clinking spoons in cups, and interruptions by intruders and a

dodgy connection etc was distracting. And we couldn't do two days of meetings on conference calls.

Did you know that dogs, wolves and humans are the only animals to show the whites of their eyes? And that is important in communication. By seeing the whites of the eye a lot can be gathered about what a person is thinking and how they are reacting. That is one advantage of face-to-face meetings!

Another aspect was spelt out in a radio programme I heard one night ages ago: face-to-face meetings are the only way to build bridges. The thesis was that social media and online contributions to a discussion tend to be individualistic and possibly divisive; groups of likeminded people tend to emerge, or of people whose ideas are polarised. A wall of words can develop and emotional engagement kicks in which does not lead to consensus. Also they said that a 'popular decision by a group is not always the right one'. Food for thought.

I am about to stand down from the EC because there is time-limited membership – and that is very important. I think this should apply to all committees! One runs out of steam in terms both of new ideas and in the effort to engage. So old ideas get recycled and it becomes hard to envisage needful change. Moreover if people don't stand aside new people won't need to come forward – it has to be understood that different people will be required to fill positions before that can become an accepted way of working: the ethos of changing representation means people become more aware of the need to get involved.

Which leads me on to saying a few words about volunteering and our national dearth of volunteers.

There is a difference between an individual volunteering for a role, and the individual being approached to fill a role. I, like many people, tend to hang back. But if someone suggests I take on something, I have come to think that perhaps they can see something in me which I don't see, so maybe I should give it a try. What I'm saying is that each of us should encourage others to recognise qualities within themselves which could be of value to a community. So encourage people to come forward.

But – I think one should also be willing to put oneself forward if that is appropriate. We may 'know' we could do a job if only we had the chance.....! Others can decide whether or not to accept our volunteering.

Incidentally, the next EC will be short of two people (no Minister!) and in UniNews a call has gone out for people willing to be considered for co-option.

I am standing down from both the National and the MUA committees – I need to recharge my batteries and pause for thought. I need space!

I have been asked how I will fill my time, and my response is that when one activity ceases there is space/time to take up another – which will appear!

In Taoist thinking the future is a void. Sometimes that void seems like standing on a precipice looking into darkness. But the void may also be compared to a valley which is productive and positive. The emptiness of the valley permits water to accumulate for plants; for life-giving sunlight to flood its surface; and for its openness to give comfort. It contains all possibilities. If one calls out with one's whole being an echo will return: the affirmation of

our existence, and that we are on the right path; and the encouragement to continue our lives of exploration.

This future 'void' is not frightening, but an exciting place full of new possibilities. So think of me living gently in my 'valley' .....

**Alison Thursfield, Cheltenham & Gloucester**

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District Round-up

Dudley Diary

I will have to reel back a couple of months to report a pretty unusual Carol Service. Not a manger or a wise man in sight – only in song. Rev. Sue led the service and having made sure that we all knew the Christmas story, produced readings from the a publication produced by the Martin Luther King Peace Committee, relating memories of Christmas during WW1.

These were admirably read by Mick Higgins, whose wife Sheila and Mom-in-law Irene Hickman (Dudley) were obviously delighted at their lad's rendering of these very touching memoirs.

Here at Dudley we have just cause to be grateful to the Unitarian Music Society, to Alan Myerscough, Kerr Jamieson and Andrew Usher (organ), to David Dawson (piano and M.D.) and to Mike Skeet (recording) for the excellent CDs that they have produced. We make good use of them, because our organist (David Mearman of Stourbridge) has recently retired from work and has bought himself a house way up north in the Isle of Lewis. He spends quite a lot of time there, often having to miss services. When David is not with us, we try to coax Helen Emery of Coseley to play for us, but as she is a professional organist there is a great call on her time.

This is when the CDs are so useful; Oldbury has generously provided us with a new player, so we enjoy not just hymns, but a choir as well – good for new tunes from the purple book, *Sing Your Faith*. Dorothy Haughton made good use of them for her service celebrating the role of women, by choosing only hymns by female writers.

They were used, too, at the Mothering Sunday service led by Gavin Lloyd (Oxford). All from *SYF* but two tunes were well-known. Gavin made us smile at the start by saying he hoped we knew what we were doing, asking a 70-year old bachelor to take a Mothering Sunday Service. (I did, and was justified!) He spoke of the three famous Biblical women - Mary, Naomi and Ruth - and pointed out how often virgin birth and reverence for mothers came into many religions.

We look forward now to our Easter service, which will be led by Phil Niblock (Shrewsbury).

Barbara Russell, Black Country Group

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### Good Friday at Warwick

About nine years ago Ant Howe and the Warwick Chapel congregation decided to hold a small Good Friday service to be held at 1pm. Ant very kindly began a tradition of following the service with tea/coffee and hot-cross buns, which creates a lovely social occasion for us all. Through the years the service has grown from four or five gathered together to this year being attended by twenty-five members and friends, some joining us from as far away as Bicester. It has become a very popular tradition because the service itself is very beautiful as we give time to think, read and sing Easter hymns about the events of the first Good Friday two thousand years ago, and the impact this still has

on many individual lives. Imbued as it is with Ant's special qualities, it is something that the Warwick Congregation looks forward to every Easter. This year the chapel looked really beautiful in the Spring sunlight, and the chapel garden looked especially lovely with the plants and shrubs coming to life. We hope this Easter tradition at Warwick will long continue and do please join us next year if you can.



Elaine Nomura, Warwick, who also took the photo

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A Slice of Music & History

Before church organs became the norm, music was provided by small groups of singers and instrumentalists. The musicians were usually local people and performed for all manner of events and

celebrations. A lot of the music drew on village dance tunes as well as religious themes. The Mellstock Quire in Thomas Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree* is such a group. The musicians would often have their own local tunes for hymns and psalms. There are over 150 tunes for *While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks* for instance although most of us now only know one. Now known as West Gallery Music, the tunes and words are kept alive by groups or Quires around the UK. The term Quire (rather than choir) encompasses singers and instrumentalists. You can find a list on the West Gallery Music Association website at www.wgma.org.uk

We have been privileged in Shrewsbury Unitarian Church to have the John Moore Quire perform on several occasions, generously giving their time and talents to raise money for Amnesty and for our own church funds. One of our members enjoyed the concerts so much he joined The Quire.

The John Moore Quire is Shropshire & West Midlands based and named after a Wellington composer and musician born in 1820. Members of The Quire wear period costume and introduce the stories behind the songs and tunes with humour and insight. It's a real slice of English social history and shows how so much church music was made for and by ordinary people with liveliness and without any pomp. Against the 18th century oak panelling of our church the costumed musicians look very authentic. As in so many of our churches and meeting houses the acoustics at Shrewsbury are great. If there is a Quire in your area it's worth investigating their concerts or finding out if they could perform in your church.

Alison Patrick, Shrewsbury

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## My Visit to Jerusalem

Last autumn I had the great good fortune to be able to visit the most extraordinary and exciting city in the world: Jerusalem.

I saw so many wonderful and historical sites in Jerusalem that it is difficult to remember the order of events, so I will start with the place that meant the most to me. This was the Garden Tomb which (like General Gordon of Khartoum) I felt was the true site of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus with the rock formation in the shape of a skull on the cliffs behind the garden, fitting some Biblical descriptions (St John's Gospel Ch19 V17,18).

At the end of the 19th century The Garden Tomb Association in London (many members were of the Anglican Church) bought the site and have since preserved it to keep it sacred for which we owe much gratitude, and it is still partially staffed by visiting clergy from England. The garden itself is an oasis of peace and calm filled with flowers, and lovely corners where one can pray or meditate. It took me right back to familiar passages in the New Testament, I found the garden to be moving, deeply meaningful, and exquisitely beautiful.

On one side of the garden is the ancient tomb which one can well believe is the place where the body of Jesus was laid. Everything about this garden took me back to the Biblical stories of the tomb, the stone rolled away, the appearance of a gardener to the weeping Mary Magdalene (St John Ch20), then her realization that the gardener was actually Jesus.

I could see it all there in the garden and I felt that Jesus would choose this place to be as it is: a lovely, simple and beautiful memorial to Him rather than the very ornate, busy but glorious Church of the Holy Sepulchre which has been the chosen

crucifixion/burial site of Jesus by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. This site is remarkable in that it is full of splendour, colour, treasures, the chanting of monks, the spinning of incense and the devotion of thousands of pilgrims who visit it every day. To say that it is a hive of activity would be an understatement, and it certainly buzzes like a hive. The Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Christians and the Armenians have shared the stewardship of the Holy Sepulchre for hundreds of years. (Does it say something about the British that we have a separate site ?!). Next to the Holy Sepulchre we saw a small monastery where Ethiopian monks have their cells and a chapel. I found this absolutely intriguing as it looked completely unchanged from centuries back.

Approaching The Holy Sepulchre is the Via Dolorosa where we walked between other visiting groups and paradoxically amongst shop-keepers, jewellers, carpenters, and food vendors of every description! Despite the bustle of activity we paused to pray at all the stations of the cross as did all the other groups who slowed or quickened their pace to accommodate each group. Each station was marked in a different way: a plaque, a painting, a sculpture; each stimulating a special prayer. It was an unforgettable experience to make this Biblical walk.

Another Biblical walk which we took while in Jerusalem was down the Mount of Olives from where we could look across at the Holy City and the Dome of the Rock and the famous Jewish burial sites, some parts of which go back 4,000 years. This was such a stunning walk with the amazing vistas we had all seen photographs of so many times. Now we were here, and it was absolutely thrilling, especially when we got down to the Garden of Gethsemane which was beautifully kept and protected, with its lovely olive trees of which it is claimed they have roots going back to the times of Jesus! Next to the Garden we saw the Church of the Agony, a

gorgeous work of artistic devotion depicting scenes of the night before the crucifixion. We then walked across to the church of Dominus Flevit with its view of the city and where Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and we passed the nearby beautiful white and gold Russian Orthodox domed Church of Mary Magdalene. This church is the surprising burial place of Prince Philip's mother Princess Alice of Battenberg whose dying wish was to be buried on the Mount of Olives. Princess Alice was a Greek Orthodox nun, and because she was honoured as "Righteous Among Nations" by the Israelis for saving the lives of a Jewish family by hiding them in her house in Athens (for a year), while she looked after the poor during World War II, the Israelis allowed her to be buried here.

Later the same day we went in to the Old City of Jerusalem and were able to visit the most sacred of Jewish sites: The Wailing Wall, the only remaining part of the Jewish Temple that is accessible to non-Muslims. I simply could not believe I was there and I felt so immensely privileged to be able to pray at the small women's section of the wall. It is customary to write a prayer on a small piece of paper which one then rolls into a tiny tube which is then inserted into a crevice in the wall. I hope my prayer is still there! While we were at the Wailing Wall we were able to see many Bar Mitzvah ceremonies of thirteen years old Jewish boys taking place in front of the men's part of the wall. It was a wonderfully photogenic moment!

It was so enticing to look across to the Dome of the Rock ( the Haram Al-Sharif) which is the third most holy site in the Muslim world, but to know that we were denied access for religious and security reasons.

The next day we visited the Yad Vashem which is the memorial to the Holocaust. It is a magnificent museum, deeply depressing, but at the same time uplifted by the beauty of the architecture and the

serenity of the creative ideas. It is an absolutely stunning architectural triumph. The appalling and heart-rending contents of the museum we are all too familiar with.

Later that day we returned to the old part of Jerusalem within the ancient city walls with its eight gates containing the Jewish, the Arab, the Armenian and the Christian sections. It is a confusion of cultures and activities, full of intriguing sights, and full of history. It is sad that it is so full of strife and difficulties because I would love to go back to explore further. However it was time to leave Jerusalem the next day in order to visit other parts of the Holy Land. I left with a sense of great satisfaction and gratitude, and also wondering by what strange miracle those emotional and intensely memorable New Testament sites have survived for 2,000 years.

**Elaine Nomura, Banbury and Warwick**

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Growth and Springtime

When Jane Couper took her first service as President at Unitarian New Meeting in Birmingham in March, her address was a call to action.

We are normally used to being in smallish congregations, so we are cheered and enthused greater gatherings. At no time does that sense become more palpable than when we sing together (and are surprised the volume!) It feels uplifting and encouraging to be in this bigger group of like minded people.

And then we have that nagging question “Why? Why don’t more people want to travel with us?” Cast your minds back to our Annual Lunch in the Autumn when Andy Pakula explored with us the implications of growth. When he asked, “How big do you want your church to be?” 10% bigger. 20%? Twice as big? We

soon appreciated (as we mentally counted our seats, hymn books, cups & saucers or mugs) that, if declining or stable congregations concerned us, so too would expansion! Still, it might be nice to have a different set of problems for a change!

We aren’t alone wondering this. Lots of other churches do too and I’ve looked at some of the ways the issue is considered. Commonly, they all try to ensure people aren’t alienated by analysing the welcome and hospitality a newcomer receives, believing this, done badly, can put people off absolutely. And here I slip in my text for this service, from the letter to the Hebrews 13.2 *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

But now, back to the lists of ways which churches may put people off. These often take on a mildly amusing and contradictory tone –and many of us have been on the receiving end of these but, please, don’t let us have committed them! So, here we go: no one said “Hello”, too friendly, limp handshake, too much enthusiasm, no eye contact, apathy in making a greeting, being asked “Is this your first time here?”, body odour, bad breath, bad coffee, stale biscuits and unclean facilities. To these I would add some personal examples of what I find off putting: chipped crockery, dusty old artificial flowers, dying pot plants and those randomly bizarre objects members of the congregation no longer wanted, but couldn’t quite part with completely, so “gave” them to the chapel.

The phrase “Thinking hospitality is evangelism” came up in the more evangelically inclined sites. I guess I know what they’re getting at. They are really saying “Mistaking hospitality for evangelism” namely, it’s not enough to be hospitable, Jesus wants souls. Put like that, this is probably where panic sets in for many

of us, but I think what people **do** want is hospitality at its most profound, I might put it something like this,

“Whoever you are, and wherever you are on your journey through life, you are welcome amongst us.”

However, that’s pretty bold and you better be sure you can really sign up to the implications of it! Even more pertinently, can you live up to your own statement of welcome? The best welcomes need to be sensitive, attuned to the individual garnished with perhaps a touch of humour. This is from Cheltenham & Gloucester’s web site and, although it must have been some time ago, I thought it was spot on. Someone recalled,

“On my first visit I was greeted by the minister, the Rev. Michael Dadson who said “You are welcome to walk with us for as long as seems right; now come and sit by May. She is an atheist and will keep you straight.”

The best one of all was on the Diocese of Bath and Wells web page for the topic of welcome, where it simply had “Sorry, page not found.” Draw your own conclusion!

Naturally, we believe we do have something to offer, share and give to others searching, and, as a symbol for this I take one of the images of the Buddha where he is shown with one hand held out open symbolizing generosity and the other raised in the gesture of fearlessness and compassion.

We do have that “open hand” and can truly say we offer with the expectation that it will be considered, but not, swallowed whole. We do not expect uniformity of belief. Rather we want ideas to be tested against an individual’s own experience and judgment. As a result, some will come and stay, but others will

come, spend time with us (as Michael Dadson said “*You are welcome to walk with us for as long as seems right*”) and then they move away to continue their journey elsewhere. And we wish them well as they move on. But, our position is not an easy one. It can be hard not to feel the rejection when you have shared something you value. But often, this isn’t exactly what happens. More usually, someone appears, is welcomed and, after a while of decreasing attendance, quietly disappears. Later, someone notices that we haven’t seen X for some time and there is general recognition of the truth of this observation. We hazard a few reasons to account for their absence, and we’re mildly disappointed, but realistically that can happen.

Well, yes, it does, but we need to be more demanding of ourselves, WHY didn’t they want to stay? Perhaps we need a mirror in front to check ourselves out- after all, we don’t even leave the house without a quick check in the mirror. That mirror lets us look at ourselves from an external perspective, what do you imagine the newcomer sees? They will be busy, trying to take in and assess as much as possible and we, the old hands, should check in that mirror – because we can’t assume we’re all seeing the same thing. Whatever and whoever they see is a clue to the community we have created- and decisions can be made on very short acquaintance. And that is the responsibility of all of us. Go, look in that mirror because others notice things we may miss.

One of our biggest mirrors is *The Inquirer* and many of you will have read Graham Phoenix’s half page article headed “Disillusioned Anglican defector departs.” For me, that made painful reading. There are so many questions I want to ask of him but I fear he may have touched on some very sore points. If we want to welcome, or invite, we need to be sure we’re happy with the product we offer. Whatever your response to his view,

if we have something to offer (and I believe we have riches to share) we need to realise how we seem to others. If we appear to be an island trying to be entire of itself, located in some past happy land, how does that welcome or attract others now? If we are simply the awkward squad, the talking shop that has no listening shop, the picky, prickly people with tin ears, does that help? Dare you recognise yourself in the UU joke “Why can’t Unitarians sing very well in choirs? Because they’re always reading ahead to see if they agree with the next verse.”

If we are people of engagement, committed, enquiring, with lively interests and concerns, outward looking: receptive, open and, who in addition, CHOOSE to come to church or chapel because, in the fullness of life, it adds something, it enriches, broadens, stretches, deepens, quietens, expands, strengthens. It opens us up, rather than closing us in -then we’re sailing ships not submarines. When we come together is this how we feel or look?

This takes commitment and work but we have help and I really want to commend to you the District training days and events organized by Sue. Don’t look at them and think “Oh, I don’t need to conduct namings “(or whatever the subject might be.) It’s about understanding more of what we do and how we do it. *You* may well be able to share an experience or idea that makes what we do even better, it’s about meeting new people as well as old friends. What about coming to the Spring Training Day “The Road Ahead” here next month led by Rob Gregson of Simple Gifts who spoke to us a couple of years ago and was so well received? And these events are FREE. Come and add yourself to these events and return home with more ideas and possibilities.

We are walking advertisements for the denomination, we are its free publicity. We don’t have to be saints (but if you can be one, please go right ahead!) just regular human beings, life enhancers, so that others look at us and say “I’d like some of that.”

Remember that second hand of the Buddha, raised in the gesture of “Fearlessness.” I think we do find it hard to be fearless because we’re so anxious not to appear as proselytizing, hard selling, preferring to be even-handed and aware of our imperfections - with the effect that we may be a bit too low key, apologetic even. We need to feel confident in what we have to offer. So, when you go to your own Church or Chapel tomorrow, ask yourself how our best publicity is looking, imagine what it all says to a stranger – the stranger we are bid to invite into our midst. And when you are out in the wider world be our free publicity. It’s Lent, think about giving up something that we perpetuate that is no longer fit for purpose. And take on something, a fresh eye and renewed enthusiasm. Remember what bought you to this funny old movement of ours with all its flaws, all its magnificence, its soul searching and its good people -with an invitation to welcome, to include, and turn strangers into angels!!

Jane Couper, MUA President



image by Pixabay

Some thoughts of Spring

It is a truly February day an –ish day – coldish, dullish and dampish. But it being February, I remember a rhyme my Mom used to say, all those years ago – Listen and you will hear, child, a most miraculous thing, the weariest month of the year, child, is the shortest and nearest to Spring. The word ‘Spring’ changes everything - it is not a dull world out there, after all. No, it is a Power house, a coiled Spring waiting to be unleashed and to fling out daisies and daffodils, buttercups and crocuses, the heavenly blue grape hyacinth, the boughs of prunus heavy with blossom to rival snow.

I don’t have a favourite season – all have their merits, but Spring comes very close, with its feeling of ‘get-up-and-go’, and though mine has got up and gone some time ago, I still get the urge to be up and doing, if it is only tidying up my drawers (as in chest of) or sorting out the kitchen cupboards and seeing what has passed its sell-by date (but not necessarily its ‘smell-by’ date).

But my greatest joy is going round the garden and seeing what is happening out there and there is always something new – it inspired me to write these words (to the tune of Melcombe):

New every springtime, Mother Earth
Rejoices in her own rebirth
When ground and grass, when leaf and bud
Breathe, like an anthem, ‘God is good’.

Then every day a new surprise
Will brighten winter-weary eyes,
And we shall know, with just one glance,
That we now have a second chance.

We must not let it go to waste
By hurrying on in heedless haste,
But let the March winds blow away
The bitter thoughts of yesterday

Get reconnected with that Power
Made manifest in folk and flower:
The good, the bad, the small, the great,
The friends we love, the foes we hate.

Then let the ever-strengthening sun
Take up the task by wind begun
To show the way we can increase
Our wisdom, service, joy and peace

If we could vow to make each Spring
The time of our self-wakening,
Through summer sun to winter snow
We’d watch our inner garden grow-

With faith deep-rooted as a tree,
Bright hope and cheerful charity,
And, like an essence from above,
The light, the warmth, the power of love.

One of the rituals I have kept from my days of going to an Anglican church is the Lenten season. We had one very nice vicar who would tell us that it wasn’t spring cleaning that was needed, but soul cleaning. If only we could get rid of our bad habits as easily as we shift the dust and grime from our rooms! I have tried to follow his advice and have a good look at the prejudices I no longer need, at the resentments that have spent to long cluttering up my thoughts.

It is in spring that I can make New Year resolutions, not in January in the aftermath of Christmas, when the last cold turkey sandwich is curling up its crust in a sneer. Now I can see clearly what I need to do and what I need to change. The seeds of good intentions planted now have a fair chance of growing; like sunshine will reveal dust, please God a new resolve will highlight any back-sliding and give the will to get back on track.

That's what spring does. I'm sorry, Pope Gregory, but you never should have changed the dates –you should have left us with the really NEW Year. It's SPRING! Happy New Year

Barbara Russell, Black Country Group

Sun-song

Not everyone knows about Spring. Oh yes, they know about the lighter nights-we had our dinner in daylight, they say, or it is easier to get up on these light mornings. Clever people who gaze at the stars all night or crouch over a computer showing pictures of the heavens say "We know all about that. It is the revolution of the Earth"

But some wise people know that it is actually the Spring holding on to the coat-tails of the sun and making him linger just those few minutes longer. When the sun sees what is happening he says "It's Spring" and he throws back his glorious golden head and laughs. The laugh turns into a song that races with the light down to dark earth. The light always wins, but when it reaches the earth it has to stop. Not so the Song! The Song goes through the dark earth until it reaches the sleeping seeds, and they hear and whisper 'It is the Time' And on goes the Song, to the white roots of things in bud, and they send out the message 'It is the Time'; on to the gnarled roots of trees, the birch and the pine, the beech

and the maple, even the sequoia, the great redwoods, who have heard the Song for a thousand Years -and to all the message comes 'It is the Time' The roots seek out nutrients for great branches and the little new twigs and the leaves that will soon be singing their own Song in the wind.

The sensible house-person will notice the sun because it shines on the dust and makes it glitter, so out comes the cleaning cloths and the sprays and the dust is banished. But house-persons who are wise as well as sensible know that dust is patient - it is after all, as old as time – so they leave it for a rainy day and go out as soon as they possibly can, to find a green space-a field, a park, a garden or even a zoo! There they look at the clean new growth and breathe the clean sweet air and sometimes – sometimes they will hear the echo of the whisper of the Song and they too, will know it is the Time. Time they were as clean and fresh as the new grass and the sweet air. On the outside yes, they are showered and shampoo'd, powdered and painted, but they know that on the inside there is dust –the dust of broken promises, of hastily spoken words, of kindnesses unacknowledged, of guilts perhaps as small as dust, but like dust in a machine, hampering the smooth running of their lives. Sad, but what to do?

Then God, who made the sun and the Song and the earth, makes them remember a big black book that sat on the table in Grandmama's house. Grandmama would tell stories of a shepherd boy who, long ago and far away, felt just the same. He cried to the eternal God who had made him, and the sun and the Song "Create in me a clean heart, O God". That is a prayer God is always ready to listen to, whether it is a shepherd boy, or people like you and me. It is a prayer not just for spring - though its freshness may remind us - but for all the seasons. ANONYMOUS

submitted by Barbara Russell, Black Country Group

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

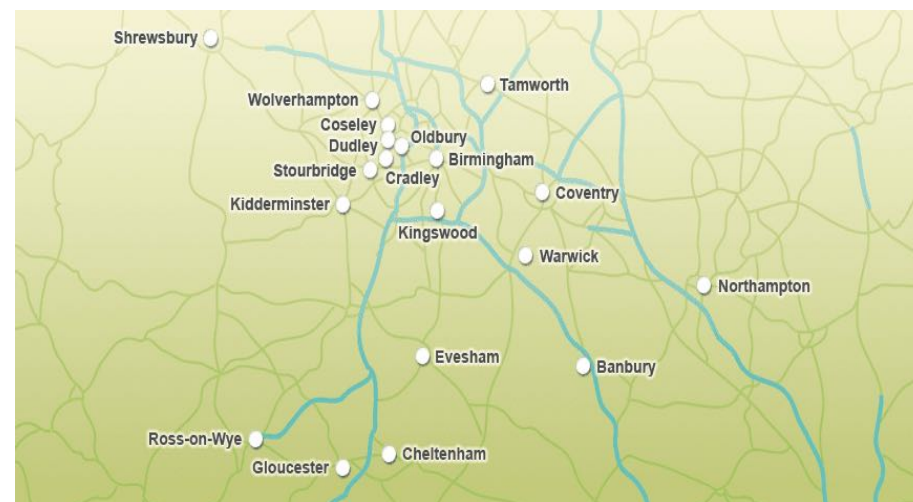
Last Sunday of the Month:

Banbury	Unitarian Fellowship	11.00 am
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Spring Housecleaning of the Spirit by Richard S. Gilbert

In the holy quiet of this promising hour of Spring,
 May we purge ourselves of coldness of spirit that warm Spring
 breezes may thaw our souls;
 May the debris of wrongs unforgiven be gathered and discarded
 so we can start anew;
 May slowness of spirit, frozen by cold, be quickened to every
 fresh possibility;
 May that song that has lingered too long in our lungs be inspired
 by twittering bird choruses;
 May the grime of mistakes made be rinsed from our minds with
 the springtime waters of self-forgiveness;
 May the dust of the exhausting journey be wiped from the
 furniture of our lives, so that it gleams again;
 May we muster the strength to do our own Spring housecleaning
 of the spirit.
 Amen

The Summer 2015 issue will be published in August.

**Please may we have your contributions on local matters,
 & on the theme of "Our Vision for the Future"**

by Monday 3rd August 2015

Thank you!