



MU NOW

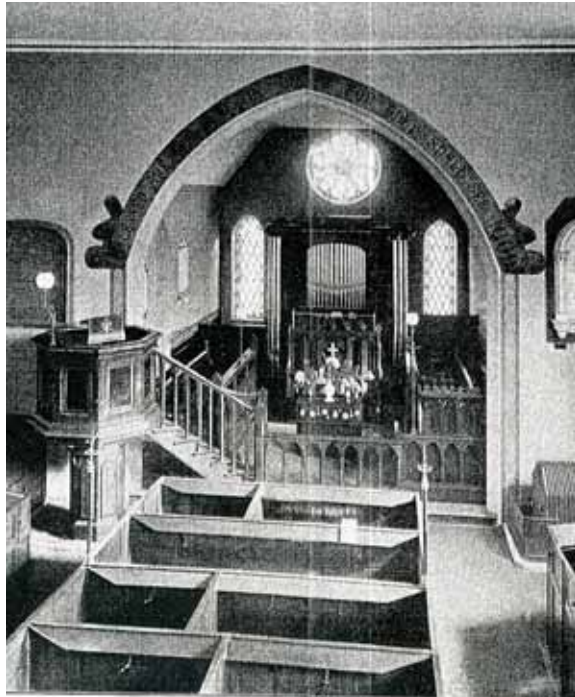
MAGAZINE OF THE MIDLAND UNION OF UNITARIAN &
FREE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

'THREE GIFTS FOR A CHILD' issue

SEASONS



GREETINGS



Warwick Chapel, c.1900



ISSUE 25

WINTER ISSUE

DECEMBER 2008

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Thank you to everyone who supplied their newsletters and articles for us to use in compiling this edition of MU Now.

Our next edition is due for publication in April 2009. Secretaries, please send your entries for 'Around the Churches', with photos if possible. For those congregations that produce a newsletter, please ensure you send us a copy too. Individual contributions - in any form - would be warmly welcomed. If any members would like to send in brief profiles of themselves for publication we would be happy to include them.

Please send articles, news, letters and photos by **28 February 2009** to:

Jenny Buckland

Or (preferably as attachments) to our email account at: munoweditors@googlemail.com
And again, we ask congregations to please tell Jenny how many copies of MU Now they require. Are we sending too many? Or not enough?



From the Editor's Desk

Seasons' greetings to all the congregations in our Midland District from your Editorial team.

Whatever difficulties the congregations face, whether it be declining numbers, an uncertain future, or structural problems in the Church, let this be a time to gather together joyfully, and reflect on the gifts we can share, that are much more precious than those bought in shops.

Everyone brings something to our community. Your presence is valuable, that experience of shared worship essential. Few of our Churches have services on Christmas day, an ideal hard to achieve in smaller congregations which could be scattered around the country, with family and friends, but I am sure each congregation will have celebrated Christmas in their unique Unitarian way.

Last year, in our Cotswold Group Newsletter I reflected on the fact that for some, Christmas may not be a happy time, but one of sadness and loneliness, so perhaps we should start a tradition of choosing a time, say 10:00 a.m. on Christmas day when we stop and remember all our friends and family, so that no-one should feel forgotten. This could link in well with the fact that this is the time Kingswood Meeting House will be starting their worship.

We asked you to think about three gifts you would wish for a child; and of course the suggestions we received were not for material gifts. What a pity that for some Christmas is almost ruined wondering what to buy, and how to pay. I hope the current financial situation will make us return to a simpler approach to Christmas.

Next time, our theme will be **'Worship'**. It's a word we use a lot, but what does it mean? We'd like to hear your ideas. What **is** worship? What sort of worship happens in your congregation?; What works for you? What doesn't?

For the August edition, we will be asking **'What inspires you?'** We hope you will be inspired to write to us.

May peace and joy be with you.

With best wishes, Jenny. ☺



About the editorial team

MU Now is prepared by an Editorial team with varied gifts and talents. I was given the role of Editor because I am a member of the MU Executive; and therefore accountable to them for the content and expenditure. I knew Kath Riley and Michael Pownall were whizz-kids in computers and would produce a quality magazine.

We meet to discuss the content and its arrangement. Michael and I prepare some of the entries and Michael types everything I write. Kath produces the finished result for the printer, including many contributions of her own. We are grateful to Top Flight in Cheltenham for their speedy production with such a high standard.



Mike Pownall

Kath Riley is on the end of the email address; I receive any printed newsletters and assorted letters, some handwritten which Michael types and emails to Kath.

This is a good team, each with something to contribute, but Kath is the linchpin, and without her, none of it would happen. Our final comment, however good we are, we cannot do anything without your help. Please keep us informed about your services, activities, special events, anything you would like to share with the wonderful group that forms the Midland Union.

Jenny. ☺



Kath Riley

But sometimes the linchpin slips ... sorry for the later-than-expected arrival of your MU Now this time; a combination of life and computer glitches set me behind, I won't bore you with the details! KR

President's Musings

Greetings, Friends.

At this season we look towards Christmas and the gifts we want to give; this edition of MU Now is focussing on "What 3 gifts would you wish for a child?". Enlarge that vision! What gift (or gifts) can each of us bring to our Spiritual community?

I sometimes wonder why we meet together as churches or fellowships. Habit is certainly part of the reason for many people, but there is also the feeling that we "get something" from a service, and I include meeting with friends and "getting" support.

Is it all about "getting"? I believe we must be ready to *give* to the community before we can ourselves benefit. And what each person brings will be different – differences to be valued.

I have a newspaper cutting about a man called Marcus Buckingham, a shy English boy who stammered at school, but became one of America's most successful business gurus and a best selling author. He graduated from Cambridge in Psychology, and took a job in the USA with Gallup, never intending to stay there. However, he became involved with the "speaking" circuit where he developed Rock Star status. What's his main thesis?

"Find out what you don't like doing, and stop doing it. Your greatest opportunity comes from your strengths – too many people think it's about working on their weaknesses."

Perhaps we can learn from him. We don't come from identikits; we each have our own strengths. We can bring our strengths as gifts to give our community. Cultivate whatever you do well and share those talents. Be grateful for what you can *give* – and having given, we will find we have received.

I wish everyone a joyful Christmas season and a New Year full of hope.

Alison



MU Announcements

What's in a name?

I have had a couple of responses to my request for suggestions for a new name for the Midland Union. It seems that everyone is agreed that we should include "Unitarian" or "Unitarians" in there somewhere, but opinions differ as to what the new name should be. We discussed it at the last Executive Committee meeting (in September).

Among the suggestions put forward are the following:

- Midland Unitarians (MU)
- Midland Unitarians Association (MUA)
- Association of Midland Unitarians (AMU)
- Midland Unitarians District Association (MUDA)

Advocates of the last argue that unless the word "District" appears in there somewhere, we could be mistaken for a geographically spread group of individuals (like the National Unitarian Fellowship), rather than a collection of congregations. Which is a good point.

What do you think? We'll be discussing it at the AGM, which is being held at Coventry.

Thank you. Sue Woolley

Midland Union Pulpit Book

Our District Facilitator, Sue Woolley, has now completed this wonderful Worship Resource - a file of readings, prayers, opening words and closing words contributed by MU people. If your congregation hasn't had its copy yet, please talk to Sue.

An idea on Christmas cards

Instead of sending cards to each of your friends at your chapel/church/fellowship, why not just write one to include them all? Such 'communal' cards could become part of a Christmas card display on the notice board.

The money saved could (if wished) be donated to a charity, or the Nightingale Centre.

PARGETER & WAND TRUST

Charity No. 210725

Clerk: Mrs Heddwen Hewis, M.Sc.

1, Little Blenheim, Yarnton, Kidlington, OX5 1LX

01865 372265

Email: peter.hewis@hmc.ox.ac.uk

We are seeking a new Clerk/Treasurer from March 2009 to replace Heddwen Hewis who has done the job for more than twenty years. In recent years we have streamlined the trust and reduced the workload for this post; the duties amount to around 80 hours per year.

One meeting a year is held at the headquarters of BCOP (*Broadening Choices for Older People*), which is very close to Kings Norton station in Birmingham. Other work is usually carried out from home and by email so any applicant will have to be computer literate with some knowledge of book-keeping.

An honorarium of £1000 and expenses plus any travelling expenses will be paid. The honorarium will be reviewed annually.

The Trust dates back to 1868, and was set up by a Coseley Unitarian to make small gifts to ladies aged 55 or over who have never been married. Gifts to beneficiaries are paid out quarterly and the present rate is £100 per quarter. The Trust also makes one off grants towards items like a new fridge, cooker etc. Nine Trustees, eight of whom are Unitarians from the Midlands, manage the Trust.

For details of the duties please contact Heddwen Hewis at the above address. The deadline for applications in writing to the Clerk is January 31st 2009.

What does 'Love' mean?

This question was posed to a group of 4 to 8 year-olds. You will find some of their answers scattered through this edition of MU Now.

'When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth.' *Billy - age 4*

MU District Facilitator: summer/autumn update

Hello again. The Summer and Autumn months have been quite busy for me. Here's a summary of what I've been doing, around the Midland Union.

You should now be getting quite used to seeing the monthly **Midland Union-wide Preaching Plan**, with **Bits & Pieces** on the back, which contains news of past events around the Midland Union, and details of forthcoming events. If you aren't seeing it, ask your Pulpit Secretary! Thanks to all the congregations who send me their newsletters – Northampton, Cotswold Group, Oxford, Kidderminster, Kingswood, Warwick, Coseley, Birmingham UNM, Shrewsbury and Coventry. As I said last time – please keep them coming!

Leading worship around the Midland Union: By the time you read this, I will have delivered nearly 30 services around the Midland Union during 2008. My diary for 2009 is fairly empty at the moment, so if you would like me to take a service in your church / chapel, please get in touch. As a GA-qualified lay preacher, I am also available for rites of passage, should you wish it.

The GA's Worship Studies Course Foundation Step training took place in June, July and August at Kingswood, and attracted no less than 17 aspiring lay worship leaders, of whom 16 completed the course. Well done to all of you! I know that many of the delegates have gone on to lead worship in their own and other churches around the Midland Union, which is splendid. And at least one hardy soul (no less a person than one of your Editors) has taken it further and has started the Preliminary Step, which is the next stage towards becoming a GA-recognised Lay Preacher. Well done Kath!

Autumn Training, on the topic of Pastoral Care, will be taking place (or possibly has done by the time you read this!) at the end of November, again at Kingswood. Our ministers Don Phillips (Cotswold Group) and Ant. Howe (Kingswood & Warwick) will be leading it. It is open to all, not just lay preachers or worship leaders.

Publicity, Publicity, Publicity: some progress has been made in ensuring that every congregation has an up-to-date, relevant website (or a page on someone else's). The MU website has two

new pages: one for the Birmingham District Women's League, and "How do I become a Unitarian?", an article by Rev. Phillip Hewett, which was copied with his permission from the Canadian Unitarians' website. The news and events page is also being kept up to date – if there is anything you would like me to include, please send it.

Meetings outside Sundays: In the last issue of *MU Now*, I mentioned that I am very interested in how congregations get together outside of Sunday worship. I have now visited as many of these get-togethers as I can, and have been encouraged and uplifted by the variety of ways in which members of MU congregations connect with each other. As I said last time, the great thing is that we are meeting a spiritual need in our communities.

As you can see, I have been quite busy, and am still enjoying myself enormously. My OU exam was at the beginning of October, and I have just about got over the trauma of having to write by hand for three hours! Typing for that long on a computer is no problem, but boy oh boy, did my wrist ache by the end of the exam! Fortunately, next year's course has an extended essay instead of an exam.

I look forward to seeing many of you in the near future.

Sue Woolley, District Facilitator, Midland Union

Counting on God

The Lord our God is 1derful
And omnipotent,2;
It's wor3mbering all the things
The good Lord does 4 you.
Without his power we can't sur5
The cla6 tell us so,
Hi7ly love must perme8
The whole of Earth below.
Be9 the love to all folk sent
And in its grace we rest con10t

Barbara Russell



Hint, you need to read
the numbers, too!
Thanks, Barbara.

Highlights from around the Churches

Bayshill enjoys hosting **Cotswold Group** events, and this year it was our turn to welcome the congregations to the Group Harvest service. We have long since abandoned displays of fruit and vegetables (items from supermarkets deemed inappropriate). For a while we collected "dry goods" which were given to a local charity, but more recently we have just asked people to give money. This year we responded to the appeal from Birmingham to support their Christmas Fayre for deprived children. We hope our £75 will help to make a difference.

We shall join in the Cotswold Group Christmas Service in **Evesham**, and also look forward to "Christmas at Bayshill" on December 21st and to our final service in 2008 which is to be an "experimental" hour of worship, an appropriate way to look forward to a New Year, when I am sure our interesting, challenging and diverse congregation will continue to thrive.

Bayshill, **Evesham** and **Oxford** were just some of many of MU congregations which commemorated the life and work of Theophilus Lindsey, the founder and minister of the first-ever Unitarian congregation in Britain, on Sunday 2nd November, the bicentenary of his death. And **Oxford** Unitarians have been invited to create a two-minute PowerPoint presentation about the life of the congregation, for projection on to a big screen during the annual meeting of the Unitarian General Assembly in April 2009. If you have ideas for what to feature - or photographs of Oxford chapel activities - please send them to Jacky Woodman.

On 19th October Joyce Ashworth, this year's President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, led Oxford's anniversary service, celebrating 115 years of worship in the chapel.. Soprano Anni Nakamura sang Mozart's *Laudate Dominum*.. Candles were lit to commemorate Revd Dudley Richards and Hilda Chart, who died in the past 12 months, and to celebrate the births of Tobias Fullagar and Benjamin Schuman. Candles too were lit to welcome 13 new members.

Warwick's newsletter included an interesting report by Malcolm Burns on the visit to Oxford, made while Northshore Universalists were visiting in June. He says:

The Friday excursion to Oxford was a great treat for all.

The coach driver found himself snookered by the traffic systems as we drove in, so he had to set us down far from our destination outside the Randolph. This gave us the opportunity though to wander slowly up the Broad and Holywell, through the very centre of Oxford University, past Balliol, Blackwells and the Sheldonian Theatre to get to Manchester College, one of the traditional homes of Unitarian training. Since we arrived late after our unscheduled walk we had to rush our coffee before The Rev Peter Hewis could settle us into a fascinating account of the history of the movement and the development of MCO (now officially Harris Manchester College - but we can't always remember to say that mouthful, can we!) It was encouraging to see the Library, presided over by its imposing statute of James Martineau, being so well used by the mature students of the college, surrounded by both ancient tomes and modern computers.

There was nothing of the soggy newspaper about our fish and chip lunch in the Arlosh Hall; served by waiters, accompanied by a glass of wine and watched over by portraits of the benefactors of this fine stone Dining Hall, this was more reminiscent of Hogwarts than of the seaside prom, and the entertaining talk afterwards by the Steward was very informative. A quick look at the magnificent William Morris and Burne-Jones stained glass windows of the Chapel and at the varied treasures of the College archives was all that we could fit in before we headed off walking again across the city centre, through alleyways and past historic university buildings. We caught up with Elaine Nomura who was waiting with a guide to give us a full and anecdote-filled tour of the ancient Christ Church chapel which serves as the city's beautiful Cathedral.

This was a visit which left us all with much to reflect on during our homeward journey. And our driver even redeemed himself by

some quick thinking and deft navigation to avoid major traffic queues on the M40, getting us back to Warwick tired but exhilarated and almost on time.

Like Oxford, **Kingswood** are also increasing membership - their latest endeavour is to re-establish a Sunday School. The services of Boys Brigade captain Russell Baker have been secured to lead this important ministry. He is currently doing some preliminary work before launching in the New year. We all wish Russell and Kingswood every success in this new venture.

In response to recent reports that Ladywood in Birmingham has the highest rate of child poverty in Britain, the congregation of Unitarian New Meeting, **Birmingham**, have decided to hold a Christmas Fayre at the church on Saturday 13th December. The day will focus on bringing families from the Ladywood area into the church to enjoy food, music and festive activities at the cost of £1 per child. There will also be a Father Christmas who will give a present to every child. A local charity called The Kan's Neighbour Scheme who help to support the vulnerable families in the Ladywood area will receive all the money made on the day. The fayre is a great opportunity for the church to meet local *people* and let them know what we are about as a movement but will also be an important social project.

The Unitarian New Meeting House at **Kidderminster** has also been busy for charity. A concert by the talented pupils of the Freja Randle School of Music on 4th October; an Autumn Fair, featuring a number of teddy bears, on 1st November; an ongoing 'Bring and Buy' table; and proceeds from coffee and biscuit sales, Books and Bric-a-brac stalls, had helped raise £912 by the time of their October newsletter! Well done, Kidderminster ☺ - did you make the £1000?

Cradley had sad news to impart; their chairman, David Jones, has died, after a long illness. Glenice Bloomer tells us that 'He will be sadly missed by us here, he was such a nice person.' A new chairperson will be appointed at their next meeting after Christmas.

It is hoped that the new 'Slow Down!' markings on the road, courtesy of the local council, will help reduce the number of occasions on which the wall surrounding Coseley's Chapel is knocked down.

Unfortunately **Coventry** has joined the fashion trend and become the victims of “Lead Robbers”. Thieves have taken lead off the gulleys on both sides of the Church roof. It could not have happened at a worse time, they chose a very wet weekend.

On arrival at the Church on Monday morning, water was running down the walls, from the cement surrounds of the stained glass windows, on to the window sills and down to the floor where the wet carpet was floating. It took all week to dry out, even with extra heating, but still the damp floor had to be packed with papers to make the Church ready for Sunday Services. Fortunately a roofer has produced a good quote which is now with the Insurers, so hopefully the roof will be sealed before more rain arrives.

On a lighter note, an excellent Harvest Service was conducted by Rev. Ann Latham on 12th September, though some friends and members were ill or on holiday so numbers were down. However, everyone present enjoyed the Service followed by tea and refreshments in the hall.

Shrewsbury held an Exhibition, created by Dorothy Cross of Dublin, which was a series of videos on the Galapagos Islands, and the relationship between the animals and the people, especially in the market, where the pelicans raided the discards tubs in the fish market, and the iguanas watched the people preparing vegetables, waiting for dropped shells and leaves.

In October their Harvest Festival Service was celebrated by our president Mrs Joyce Ashworth, followed by a shared lunch, and 2 weeks later the Mayor and her Consort were invited to the Anniversary Service, led by Rev Penny Johnson; Mrs Chebsey, the mayor, has since written saying how much she enjoyed it.

The Building project to install a galley kitchen, and a loo to accommodate our disabled members, is going ahead slowly, but hopefully will start soon. Even so, in October Ann Fuller, Minister of 4 Churches in Florida,, found the Church delightful and a great improvement on any of the modern Churches she serves. She had a wonderful day visiting all the places she had hoped to see,

Northampton Unitarians were chosen to take part in the pilot scheme for a DVD / discussion based course, *Practical Spirituality*, which is being put together by the Hibbert Trust. Rev. David Usher, District Minister of the LDPA, is leading it.

Four people gathered for the two-hour session on 16th September. Proceedings formally started with the lighting of a candle, followed by a ‘check-in’, during which each of us expressed our personal joys and concerns. We then shared a reading ‘What is spirituality?’ by Deane Starr, which established the parameters for the session.

Next came a shared meal – Fiona had provided a variety of delicious ‘nibbles’, which all enjoyed.

The central part of the evening was watching the 30-minute DVD, which highlighted the differences between religion and spirituality, and mused about why spiritual seeking is so common these days – the loss of community, perhaps. It is envisaged that it will be one of six DVDs, making up the *Practical Spirituality* course.

Discussion on both the content and the presentation of the DVD concluded that it was a very worthwhile project, but that the content and presentation needed some ‘tweaking’.

Your editors are constantly amazed by the number and variety of events which our Midland Union congregations manage to hold, despite their often small size. You are to be congratulated!

PARSON'S PUNCH (For 60 people)

1 bottle medium white wine	3 litres Orange juice
1 bottle rum	3 litres Grapefruit juice
1 litre Ginger ale or ginger beer	3 litres Pineapple juice

(Americans prefer ginger ale, the British seem to prefer ginger beer!)
Slices of orange and lemon

For non-alcoholic punch use a non-alcoholic wine and add any kind of pop like lemonade and orange.

The recipe was given to Peter Hewis by Rev. Robert Palmer of America; will be served after the service at Oxford on December 21st, when the collection will be for the Send a Child to Hucklow fund.

Dates for your diary

Christmas Worship around the Midland Union

Sunday 14th December

11:00 a.m.	Evesham	Cotswold Group Christmas Service
3:00 p.m.	Birmingham	Carols by Candlelight

Friday 19th December

12:00 noon	Warwick	Bring and share lunch
1:10 p.m.	Warwick	Half-hour Carol Service

Sunday 21st December

11:00 a.m.	Birmingham	Carol Service
11:00 a.m.	Coseley	Carol Service
11:00 a.m.	Oxford	Christmas Service
3:00 p.m.	Cheltenham	Christmas at Bayshill
4:30 p.m.	Warwick	Carol Service

Tuesday 24th December

7:00 p.m.	Kingswood	Carol Service
11:30 p.m.	Kingswood	Midnight Communion

Wednesday 25th December

10:00 a.m.	Kingswood	Christmas Day Worship
11:00 a.m.	Birmingham	Christmas Day Service

Christmas Puppet Spectacular at Bayshill

Shows on 18-20, 22-24, 27 December

Details and tickets available from:

Colin Bailey Tel: 01242 255820 or 07940 430094

Proceeds in aid of Children in Need

MIDLAND UNION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Where: The Great Meeting House Unitarian Church
Coventry CV1 3AE

When: Saturday 21st March 2009

Time: 10.30 am – 4.00 pm

**Guest Speaker: Rev. John Harley,
Unitarian National Youth Coordinator**

Put the date in your diaries now!!

Midland Union events

Midland Union conducts training course on Pastoral Care

Nineteen delegates from eight Midland Union congregations met at Kingswood Meeting House on Saturday 22nd November, to participate in a day-long training session on the basics of pastoral care. It was led by two MU ministers, Rev. Don Phillips of the Cotswold Group, and Rev. Ant. Howe of Kingswood and Warwick, to whom our grateful thanks. The course was divided into four parts.

Part 1 covered the basics of pastoral care, whether it is a home visit, or someone button-holing you before or after a service. Advice was given on basic approaches, and some good ideas were shared e.g. maintaining a birthday card list of congregation members, and sending each one a card from everyone else. The emphasis was on the community caring for the community.

Part 2 was on the art of listening. We were given tips on how to listen and how to respond, including examples of inappropriate responses; and then did a listening and recalling exercise, which was most enlightening.

Part 3 covered the limits of confidentiality and no-go areas. There were three key messages from this session:

- You can ring any minister in the District to ask for advice, or the MU District Facilitator or Treasurer. We can always be reached in an emergency. Also remember Essex Hall – Peter Teets or Rev. Steve Dick are the people to ask for.
- The key question is: is this person a danger to themselves or others? If the answer to either of these is “yes”, then you can break confidentiality.
- There are limits to what you can cope with yourself. If what you are told involves abuse, a suicide threat, or some danger to others, involve the police or emergency services.

Part 4 covered particular issues concerned with the pastoral care of children and the bereaved. With children, there needs to be a balance between ensuring their safety and well-being, and not being vulnerable yourself. There is safety in numbers.

With an aging population, bereavement is a common problem in any Unitarian community. We were given simple advice on how to approach a bereaved person, with sympathy and empathy. We were reminded that grief is a long-term thing, and that special sensitivity will be required on anniversaries – of the death, on the deceased's birthday, and at Christmas.

The plenary session yielded the following good advice:

- Remember your own personal boundaries – there is a limit to your personal competence and the time you have available.
- If you take on the role of pastoral carer with a congregation it is worth having it in writing what the limits are & your responsibilities.
- Providers of pastoral care need care themselves sometimes.
- The vast majority of people just want recognition, comfort and the belief that they matter.

Sue Woolley, District Facilitator

Worship Studies Course Foundation Step

I wanted to wait before writing up my experience of the Foundation step of the Worship Studies Course until after I had taken my first service. Since at least one person enjoyed it (thank you Owen!) I think I must have learned something in the course.

Seventeen people from around the Midland Union (well, there was someone from Nottingham as well) met at Kingswood on the first Saturday of the month for three months in the Summer.

The level of experience of the participants varied dramatically. I think I was probably the least experienced having taken no services at all. On the other end of the scale, some people regularly took services in their churches and chapels without full-time ministers.

The course concentrated on the practicalities of taking the service – speaking up, dressing nicely, and being prompt – as well as on some of the details about choosing appropriate hymns, readings and prayers.

Aside from meeting people with a huge variety of Unitarian viewpoints, one of the best things was finding out about the various resources available for readings, poems and prayers. In particular,

the comprehensive *ABCs of Lay Preaching* is worth getting hold of even if you don't want to take any services.

As usual, the people were my favourite part. Keen, committed and enthusiastic, I learnt as much from the discussion as from Sue Woolley and Rev Don Phillips our tutors (I hope they don't mind me saying that!)

If you saw me in the pulpit, and thought that you could do the same, then I'd strongly suggest that you book yourself on the next Foundation course that's running. I'm planning on doing the next step myself soon – which looks like it involves quite a bit of work.

Angela Maher

Midland Union Annual Lunch 18th October 2008

Thirty four Midlands Unitarians (representing 17 of our 18 congregations) and guests gathered on a crisp and sunny Autumn morning at Unitarian New Meeting Church, Birmingham, to attend the Midland Union Annual Lunch. After a welcome cup of tea or coffee, we gathered in the church to hear the Rev. Penny Johnson, National President of the Unitarian Women's League, give an interesting talk about the past and future of the League. She also introduced us to her friends, puppets Goliath (a seriously cute white bunny), Miranda and Jack.

After the speech, we drank pre-luncheon sherries in the vestibule, before adjourning to the hall to enjoy the usual splendid lunch by our regular caterers, ANDDOR. This was followed by a loyal toast, given by Mr. Gavin Lloyd; the Unitarian toast "To civil and religious liberty the world over" by Mr. Sandy Ellis; and a vote of thanks to the caterers by Mr. Malcolm Sadler, who presented them with a big box of chocolates.

It was a most enjoyable event, and a good opportunity to meet up with old friends and make new.

SW

Ed: Jim Corrigan of Golders Green was also at the lunch; we've had an email from him sending his '*warm thanks to the MU and New Meeting for a splendid occasion*'. I heartily agree, Jim!

Unitarian Women's League

Birmingham District Women's League held its Autumn Meeting in early September, and although small in numbers, members wished the District to continue. The MU kindly gave the district a donation to allow us to continue to invite the League National President each year.

The AGM will be held on 28th February 2009 at which Rev. Penny Johnson (UWL National President) will be present. If anyone would like to join us, please contact me on 0121-525-1123 or email Annhughes999@aol.com

An interest has been expressed by some of the ladies at Kingswood to reform the group there, and I am going to speak to these ladies in early December.

Any one interest in Women's League should contact me (details above) - you do not have to belong to a branch; I have 17 individual Fellowship Members from various churches around the Midland Union area, and meeting twice a year, and receiving the bi-monthly League Letter keeps us all in touch with each other and with the League in general.

Ann Hughes - District and National Secretary of UWL

Ed: I must apologize to Rev. Penny Johnson for not making it clear in the last issue that she is the **National** President of the UWL. KR.

Unitarian Association for Lay Ministry (UALM)

Four members of the Midland Union - Dorothy Haughton, Malcolm Sadler, Sue Woolley and Kath Riley - attended the AGM of UALM (formerly known as UALL - the Unitarian Association of Lay Leaders) - held at the Nightingale Centre at the end of October.

Reports of the weekend have appeared in The Inquirer and The Unitarian, but we thought it worth mentioning here that the new Committee of six now has three MU members! Malcolm Sadler is President, Sue Woolley is Secretary, and Kath Riley has gained another newsletter to edit!

If you have an interest in any aspect of Lay Ministry, you will be warmly welcomed as a member of UALM - speak to Sue or check the website: www.ualm.org.uk.

Kingswood Rocks!

Saturday, the 18 October 2008, heard a most unusual sound emanating from the Unitarian Kingswood Chapel in Packhorse Lane, Hollywood.



Rev. Ant Howe at Kingswood's organ

The organ was played brilliantly by the Rev. Ant Howe in theatre style. Ant is a self-taught organist who began playing the organ in church at the age of 11. This playing progressed through to Wurlitzers and theatre music in various locations giving concerts to many groups.

On the night, musicals, films, old time favourites – they were all there, thoroughly enjoyed by the packed audience. One couldn't help but tap your feet and rock your body to the music.

Clapping and cheers rocked the Chapel at the end of each section and anyone passing must have wondered what was going on in this place of worship. But what a way to worship! Ant not only played the organ but piano too and sang beautiful, touching songs.

Proceeds of this very successful evening were divided between the Chapel and a Multiple Sclerosis charity.

Love is ...

'Love is what makes you smile when you're tired.' *Terri - age 4*

Coffee break (Part 1)

BABEL	DAMASCUS	GATH	JUDEA
BETHEL	EDEN	GAZA	MOAB
BETHESDA	EDOM	GILEAD	NAZARETH
BETHLEHEM	EGYPT	JERICHO	SIDON
BEULAH	EPHESUS	JERUSALEM	SINAI
CANA	ENDOR	JUDAH	SODOM

All the biblical places in the list can be found in the puzzle.

J	T	Z	A	B	X	O	X	V	D	Y	C	V	M	O	D	E
F	W	G	Y	I	E	T	S	Y	H	T	E	R	A	Z	A	N
D	E	G	Y	P	T	U	N	U	X	B	O	G	J	B	R	B
S	Q	D	V	R	T	H	L	D	S	B	Z	E	X	E	Y	D
I	J	E	X	M	A	D	M	A	E	E	R	N	R	T	B	D
D	U	V	U	D	Z	J	E	T	H	U	H	O	Z	H	A	D
O	D	T	U	C	X	A	H	S	S	Z	O	P	J	E	O	A
N	E	J	B	Y	M	E	E	A	U	Q	O	B	E	S	M	E
B	A	B	E	L	L	O	L	Y	G	C	S	A	M	D	R	L
D	Q	I	F	S	E	E	H	G	R	A	S	J	V	A	B	I
Z	X	L	D	I	M	D	T	V	C	F	T	A	Q	F	A	G
L	W	M	V	N	G	O	E	Q	Y	Y	W	H	M	N	V	X
Q	G	A	Z	A	G	B	B	N	M	L	I	U	A	A	U	J
X	Y	T	J	I	U	I	K	O	J	I	L	C	B	T	D	F
V	L	X	E	G	U	C	D	C	O	H	C	I	R	E	J	M
S	J	O	D	H	J	O	A	Y	P	S	A	R	O	D	N	E
G	H	D	O	W	S	K	M	S	G	L	Q	L	E	C	O	Y

Things New and Old - Part 2

[Ed: *This is the second half of the sermon by Rev Barbara Thomas, 'Things New and Old', which we began in our April issue, postponed till now due to the inclusion of the sermon given by Rev Don Phillips in Evesham on May 14th, at the Asparagus Lunch. .To recap, the first part talked of 'things new'.]*

Now let us think for a moment of the old and familiar. We have seen that the over-familiar sometimes makes us blind to facts, makes us miss them and reject them. That is how a prophet fails to be recognised in his own country. That is how Bible words may be lost to us in the haze of the familiar. Do you remember Lowell's little poem about this ? (Ed: James Russell Lowell 1819-1891)

A Parable

Worn and footsore was the Prophet,
 When he gained the holy hill;
 "God has left the earth", he murmured,
 "Here his presence lingers still."
 "God of all the olden prophets,
 Wilt thou speak with men no more?
 Have I not as truly served thee
 As thy chosen ones of yore ?
 "Hear me, guider of my fathers,
 Lo, a humble heart is mine;
 By thy mercy I beseech thee
 Grant thy servant but a sign !"
 Bowing then his head, he listened
 For an answer to his prayer;
 No loud burst of thunder followed,
 Not a murmur stirred the air:-
 But the tuft of moss before him
 Opened while he waited yet,
 And, from out the rock's hard bosom
 Sprang a tender violet.
 "God! I thank thee" said the prophet,
 "Hard of heart and blind was I
 Looking to the holy mountain
 For the gift of prophecy.

"Still thou speakest with thy children
Freely as in old sublime;
Humbleness, and love, and patience,
Still give empire over time.

"Had I trusted in my nature
And had faith in lowly things,
Thou thyself wouldst then have sought me
And set free my spirit's wings.

"But I looked for signs and wonders
That o'er men should give me sway;
Thirsting to be more than mortal
I was even less than clay.

"Ere I entered on my journey,
As I girt my loins to start,
Ran to me my little daughter,
The beloved of my heart; -

"In her hand she held a flower,
Like to this as like may be,
Which, beside my very threshold,
She had plucked and brought to me."

The old story of the healing of Naaman is an obvious example of a simple, easy remedy being overlooked in the search for something new and startling, and there have been many Naamans since then to be shocked at what seems their doctor's commonplace treatment of their very special and peculiar and important disorders. The Naaman story also gives you the way in which familiar custom and habit may blind us to virtues outside our own particular little corner. I don't know whether Elisha sent him to the Jordan because it was the nearest river, or because it was thought to have special powers, but Naaman's protest that there are perfectly good rivers in Damascus is a good example of the way we sometimes prefer our own familiar good to any foreign good whatever.

On the other hand the old and the familiar may be a true source of good. Soundness of knowledge and reliability of practice springs from intimacy and living with things. If we want to know a foreign land and people, we shall know them much more soundly by living there and earning our bread in the ordinary way than by visiting it as a

tourist and travelling up and down it. There is a certain depth of understanding which comes of living with people which could never come from constant social activities, however industrious. There is a skill which comes of close familiarity with a craft or an occupation, and even in the abstract affair of making decisions and judgments, say in a business or a trade, it is possible by practice to acquire a skill in making shrewd and sound judgments. Moreover many of the achievements which make our life most worth living have been preserved for us in old and familiar tradition, i.e. the slow accumulation of experience.

Now it may seem at first confusing to trace good and bad results both from our attitude to strange things and from our attitude to the familiar. Yet I believe you can find plenty of examples of all four. And so we may ask ourselves whether, if both apparently are needed, the harm may not arise from their separation. And I suggest that, as so often in this life, we shall find that experiences so various as almost to seem opposed nevertheless may harmonise and reinforce each other. So that the person who welcomes the new will find more value in the old, and the person who truly knows and values the old will have unafraid, quick sympathy and understanding for the new.

And that is what we find. Where people reject everything new and strange just because it is new and strange refusing to consider things that are different and stoning the prophets of startling doctrine, exactly there you find the old familiar happenings losing their interest and their vitality, and the ordinary daily round growing uninspired, uninspiring and dull. Yet where people keep their minds open and welcoming to new truths, just there you find the old truths and the old ways glowing with meaning and fresh with unending stimulus. And just in the same way, if we grow dull and blind to our own back yard, our own familiar hedgerows, so that we must for sheer boredom run up and down looking for something fresh - as St Paul saw the Athenians, spending their time in nothing else but hearing and telling some new thing - then gradually all the strange new places become tedious with a weary sameness, and however far we go and however violent our search, we can find nothing new under the sun, and the boredom which caught us in our own backyard follows us to the ends of the earth, until we find we are carrying with us the jaded spirit which can find excitement and stimulus nowhere.

But if our own town and our own backyard remain for us always the familiar setting for great and divine issues, the home of the spirit, i.e. of spirited men and women, then we shall find more stimulus and interest in a year-long acquaintance with what is at hand than our jaded globe-trotter and novelty-hunter can find anywhere, and all the time our genuine communion with the unknown in the known is fitting us for sympathy with the new and insight into the strange. It is the practice of the presence of the unknown God on ordinary familiar days which fits us to recognise our own God and our own good in strange guises and unaccustomed forms.

And so we grow to the stature of Jesus' scribe who becomes a disciple in the kingdom, and is like a householder, bringing forth out of his treasure things new and old.

Rev Barbara Thomas

As others see us

A definition found by Jon Small of Northampton

A Liberal Protestant sect which holds as its distinctive tenet the belief in a uni-personal instead of a tri-personal God. In short, present-day Unitarianism is hardly more than natural religion, and exhibits in some of its members a pronounced tendency towards Pantheistic speculation. The Church polity in England and America is strictly congregational; each individual congregation manages, without superior control, all its affairs, calls and discharges its minister, and is the final judge of the religious views expressed in its pulpit.

In Transylvania the Church government is exercised by a bishop who resides at Kolozsvár (Klausenburg) and is assisted by a consistory. The episcopal title which he bears does not imply special consecration but merely designates the office of an ecclesiastical supervisor.

The bond of union between them consists more in their anti-dogmatic tendency than in uniformity of belief. The authority of the Bible is in some degree retained; but its contents are either admitted or repudiated according as they find favour before the supreme, and in this case, exacting tribunal of individual reason.

From the Catholic Encyclopaedia

What three gifts would you give a child?

The three gifts which I would give to a child

The first gift I would make to a child is good health. It is all too easy to take for granted the enjoyment of good health – until you no longer have it. A person with good health is wealthy beyond all monetary riches. With a sound body, good hearing, and sound eyesight, there are no barriers to what you can do. You may go for a walk, dance, ride a bike, climb a mountain, run a marathon, take up parachuting – your scope is limited only by your desires, your ambitions and your pocket. Everyday activities such as walking – even running – upstairs, or ‘shopping ‘till you drop’ suddenly take on a whole new meaning when you encounter contemporaries with withered limbs, weak hearts or even those suffering from agoraphobia, for mental health is just as important as physical well-being. And there are selfish reasons too, as anyone who has lost a child will tell you. The heartbreak of losing a child from leukaemia or meningitis or any one of the host of perils facing the young, is utterly devastating – and it is a far more common happening than many realise.

The second gift would be a thirst for knowledge. An active mind, bent upon acquiring knowledge and thriving on learning, is a wondrous gift. It too, brings its own rewards to the parent, for there is nothing so stimulating as lending encouragement to the young explorer. I am constantly amazed at the number of homes which are totally bereft of books. These set a standard of normality, encouraging children to enjoy their reading, to broaden their minds and widen their horizons in a thrilling and exciting way that no amount of watching television or playing computer games can begin to match. There is a hidden agenda too, because the most interesting careers, the most satisfying careers, and the most financially rewarding careers will be open only to those who have been encouraged to develop their minds from the earliest age.

And the third gift is that of a loving nature. The ability to get on well with one's fellows is vital to one's health, happiness and prosperity. And the most crucial element in achieving this, is that you must like people, for if you do, it shows, and they in turn will like you. The

song which says 'Love makes the world go round' is absolutely true. If human relationships were always governed by love, there would be no wars and fewer disputes between people and nations. I once encountered a man who had earned a 'double first' in mathematics at Cambridge, demonstrating that he was unusually clever. But he was absolutely hopeless at human relationships, having no tact whatsoever and constantly upsetting people. With a more loving nature, he could have risen to the very top of the organization, instead of remaining in a relatively low position. A loving nature is a vital asset.

So what emerges is that these three characteristics represent the keys to the kingdom, for they unlock the doors to leading a happy successful and prosperous life. And more important, our child will leave the world a better place than he or she found it, and in so doing they will have earned the love and respect of their fellow human beings.

Sandy Ellis, Evesham

What Three Gifts would you wish for a Child?

Three gifts !!

It is wonderful how the memory banks in our brain start to work on any question that we might put to it.

In my case the answer came up quite promptly, and on reflection must have been lying there since early childhood.

The simple wish, which was thrown up from the deep recesses of my mind, was used I remember, in all manner of ways – a Birthday wish, a wish for Newly- Weds, signing an Autograph Book, (who remembers keeping an autograph book!!), a Baptismal gift, a Christmas card, or maybe to Someone moving house.

Here is that Simple Wish in just three words:

HEALTH, WEALTH & HAPPINESS !!

Who could wish for anything more ?!

Roger Mathews, Kidderminster

The three gifts

The three gifts that I would like to give to a child would be: an enquiring and open mind; a generosity of spirit and the ability not to take life too seriously.

Having an open and enquiring mind allows an individual of any age to explore and enjoy life to the full. This would include the arts both visual and written, and the beauty to be found in the natural world.

Secondly having a generosity of spirit, that is to say being generous with either time or talents in the service of others. Also, being generous in opinion or acceptance of others less fortunate than oneself. Always bearing in mind the words "there but for the grace of God, go I". But not forgetting to teach a child to be generous to themselves, enjoying their successes in school and home- and learning from their mistakes.

And finally the gift of not taking life too seriously. This does not mean that a child should not be encouraged and supported in realizing their full potential; but they should also read and reflect on the words spoken by Macbeth, a timely reminder of the transience of human life and the folly of political ambition.

Macbeth act v Scene v

Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

William Shakespeare

Stephen Gutteridge, Cheltenham

Love is ...

'Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.'

Bobby - age 7

'If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate,'

Nikka - age 6

What Three Gifts would you wish for a Child?

1 Love with discipline

A child who is truly loved by its parents and wider family and is also given discipline, will have a sense of worth, be thoughtful towards others and understand that hard work is needed to get on in life.

2 Stability

A child whose parents are divorced or separated or has to continually move home and school must feel insecure and lack a sense of belonging. A stable home with two loving parents is a great gift.

3 Freedom

Freedom from fear of strangers and new situations. Freedom to explore the countryside with friends and enjoy nature. This freedom allows confidence and curiosity to develop and makes life for the child interesting and fulfilling.

Ruth Beatson, Kidderminster,

Gift for a Child

Although I'm generally against the idea that in the *olden days* things were better, one of the features of modern life that may be worse, and is certainly not good, is the happiness of our children. British children are among the unhappiest in Europe. If that isn't a statement on the relative failure of an otherwise stable, successful and affluent society, I'm not sure what is.

I don't have a tame child to ask for advice, nor do I have any other solutions or ideas to offer. But if it were in my power to give, I would give each child happiness.

Angela Maher, UNM Birmingham

Love is ...

'You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget.'

Jessica - age 8

What three gifts would you wish for a child?

Not being a fairy, I can't quite manage the traditional three gifts: but there are three things I would wish for a child to have:

First of all, happiness. She will be growing up in the 21st century, and the chances are, it is going to be even more frenetic than the last one. As she grows, she will be bombarded with pressures to get on, get ahead, buy this, it will transform your life, and so on. I remember that my Grandad wrote in my autograph book some very good advice: **"True happiness lies in wanting what you have."** I don't mean that she shouldn't try and strive for the things that are important to her; but that I would like her to do her best, and then be content, rather than forever fretting after the next thing.

Second, I would wish her good health. When we are well, we take our bodies, those amazing complex machines, very much for granted. But if we are feeling under par, everything takes twice as much effort. So my second wish would be that she is always "crowing with triumphant life", and able to tackle life at a run.

Lastly, but by no means least, I would wish that she is brought up by a loving and caring family, and that she gets on well with them. Families are the most important unit in society. In her marvellous book 'How not to be a perfect family', Libby Purves lists the essentials:

"Children have to be fed, clothed against the elements, conversed with a great deal, protected from evildoers and poisons, and given the chance to play and read and observe the adult world. They have to be educated, to take in the knowledge and wisdom their society has developed, and encouraged to take it further as they grow up. They have to be loved and valued, and allowed to bestow their own love on family and friends."

From the safe and loving base of a family, may she go out and make contact with the wider world.

Sue Woolley
Midland Union District Facilitator

Three Gifts for a Child

Firstly the gift of good health, both mental and physical. Only then would a child be able to enjoy to the full the blessings in which the world abounds. That's not to say a disabled child is necessarily deprived of these pleasures and is unable at the same time to give immense pleasure to his/her parents. The fact remains, however, that no parent wants to see his child suffer, and parents generally wish above all for their child to enjoy a way of life that is at least comparable with their own, or preferably better.

My second gift would be sensitivity. With this quality the child would be able to relate well to his or her fellows, strike up good relationships, be aware of others' needs, develop a sense of modesty, humility and quiet contentment. Intelligence would be a bonus, but without the qualities that are linked to sensitivity true wisdom, which is much more important than intelligence, would be impossible to attain.

My third and final gift would be a sense of humour. With this one can make light of the troubles that will inevitably come one's way, develop a sense of self-deprecation that will prevent the child in later life from taking himself/herself too seriously and allow him/her to find fun in the world amidst all its problems.

These would be my gold, frankincense and myrrh for today's child. As a postscript, three things I would not give a child would be: fame, power and wealth!

Graham Williams, Kidderminster

Love is ...

Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find the most caring child.

The winner was a four year old child whose next door neighbour was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his Mother asked what he had said to the neighbour, the little boy said,
'Nothing, I just helped him cry'

Coffee break (Part 2)

Caption competition

In our last issue, we asked you to suggest captions for this photograph, taken at Great Hucklow by Syd Mathews of Cirencester. Many thanks to those who sent their captions in - they certainly kept us giggling!



and the winner is ...

We might all look the same, but don't be deceived - we're Ewenitarians!

Congratulations to Graham Williams of Kidderminster New Meeting.

Second was Alison Thursfield' - MU President - with ...

'Have we achieved consistent identity?'

Third was from Jill Hudson of UNM Birmingham -

'Keep quiet chaps. If he catches us out here we'll get a right lambasting.'

Practice makes perfect!

A little girl was sitting on her grandfather's lap as he read her a bedtime story. From time to time she took her eyes off the book and reach up to touch his wrinkled brow. She was alternately stroking her own cheek, then his again.

Finally she spoke up "Grandpa, did God make you?"
"Yes sweetheart" he answered, "God made me a long time ago."
"Oh". She paused. "Grandpa, did God make me too?"
"Yes indeed honey" he said. "God made you a little while ago"
Feeling their respective faces again, she observed,
"Gods getting better at it, isn't he?"

Poets' Corner

For Children Everywhere

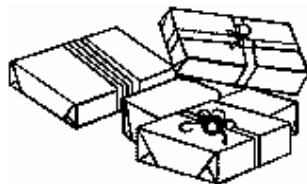
A. Bronwen Taylor

How do we learn to live
With our fellow man?
How do we learn to give,
Be the best we can?
In a child's family
Whether rich or poor
In their homes all must be
Wanted, loved, secure.
Every child needs to find
Warmth, respect and care
Joy in all humankind
And this world they share. (repeat last line)
Wonderment, mystery,
Beauty of the skies.
Glorious majesty,
Seen through children's eyes.
Misty morn's gentle light
Softly streaking sky.
Setting sun bringing night,
Lilting lullaby.
Music, art, poetry
All that can inspire.
Light the flame in their hearts,
Set their minds afire. (repeat last line)
Help your child to be true.
Teach that loving brings
Gifts which last all life through.
Give them roots and wings.
Roots to hold, (firm), secure
Anchored fast from birth.
Wings to fly strong and sure
Out to greet the earth.
Then will they learn to live
Each can be the best.
Then will they learn to give
Truly rich and blessed. (repeat last line)

Bronwen says:

This was written in August 2001, after listening to part of Dvorak's Symphony No.9 in E minor, Opus 95, "New World Symphony" in the car on the way home from a Lay Preacher's day at Evesham.

The tune is based on the Largo, 2nd Movement, "Going Home".
Verses 1 & 2 repeats the tune . The 3rd verse can do the same but it was written with the 2nd part of the tune in mind and if that is used the bracketed word (firm) is not sung.



Ed: Thanks to Bronwen Taylor for permission to print this - I saw it in her folder at one of the WSC Foundation Course training days, and begged her to send it to me for this issue!

Prayer

Henry David Thoreau

Great God, I ask for no meaner pelf
Than that I may not disappoint myself,
That in my action I may soar as high
As I can now discern with this clear eye.

And next in value, which thy kindness lends,
That I may greatly disappoint my friends,
Howe'er they think or hope that it may be,
They may not dream how thou'st distinguished me.

That my weak hand may equal my firm faith
And my life practice what my tongue saith
That my low conduct may not show
Nor my relenting lines
That I thy purpose did not know
Or overrated thy designs.



This was written by Jo Chandler for the baptism of a baby called Grace, at Kingswood on 7th September. It was so lovely that we wanted to share it with you - thank you, Jo.

None of us can walk alone
Along life's path we need to give and take.
In this busy world where there seems less time to befriend and care,
We can share our time with others,
Who may find their troubles hard to bear.
Grace who is to be baptised here today
Will often need a helping hand to hold.
At these times family and friends will prove more valuable than gold
For none of us can walk alone.

Love is ...

'When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love.'

Rebecca- age 8

Memories

Rev. Simon John Barlow

It is with great sadness that we announce the untimely death on 16th October of Rev. Simon John Barlow, from a brain haemorrhage following a collapse while shopping.

Simon John was a life-long Unitarian, originally a member of the Pendleton congregation, and was loved by many people in the denomination. Simon John was known for his enthusiasm and creativity and his ability to convey that to others.



An innovative and entertaining worship leader and an inspiring leader of religious education groups, Simon John specialised in short term ministries. Simon John was in Lay Charge at Shrewsbury & Wolverhampton 1996 – 1997, then Minister at Wolverhampton 1997 – 99 and at Shrewsbury from 1997 – 2000. Recently, he was working with Dean Row, Wilmslow, and Hale Barns congregations.

He had been actively involved in the Hucklow Summer School since its start back in 1995 and this year he was one of the week's theme speakers. His deep spirituality and caring soul touched many lives.

Marguerite Rossell, of Shrewsbury, writes:

"It was with great sorrow we heard of the death of Simon John Barlow, our last Minister. He was so innovative, and introduced us to new ways of thinking, instigated Thursday afternoon meetings to follow the Building your own Theology course (with his own slant on it!), he created a labyrinth in the Church for us, which was particularly memorable to all who took part.

He will be very much missed, and we send all our sympathy and consolation to his mother and the family, as well as all who knew him as a friend, and pastor."

In GA Chief Executive Rev. Steve Dick's words:

'our larger community is diminished by his absence.'

Thomas Poole - 1927-2008



Our more longer-standing members will remember Lay Preacher Tom Poole who came to Warwick on several occasions to conduct worship in the later years of the last century. He usually brought his wife, Joyce, with him; she was a keen Teddy Bear person who specialised in painting pictures of bears for book illustrations, etc.

Of recent years Tom has been declining in health and mind and spent the last few years in various nursing-homes in the Stourbridge area. I conducted his funeral on

12th August at Stourbridge Crematorium in front of a capacity crowd, and below are my remarks on that occasion, following an outline of his life written by his eldest son Gareth.

It is a times like this that one looks back and realises just how quickly time dashes past; I reckon that my connection with Tom goes back to the early 1950s, when I was the secretary of Vale Head Camp, in Kinver, which at that time belonged to the Unitarian Young People's League . I was also secretary of the youth club at Waverley Road Church in Birmingham and we were run by a young minister, Ron McGraw, who built up a sizeable club. There being a few others in the Midlands at that time, we used to go to Kinver quite often to camp.

Tom was one of those larger-than-life characters which the denomination seems to nurture. Many years later when we were Lay Leaders of our respective churches, Tom at Oldbury and me at Warwick, we were two of the original members of the Unitarian Association of Lay Leaders, and for the first couple of meetings to organise the group we held them at the Birmingham Boy Scouts centre at the Lickey Hills in Birmingham. One Saturday evening, as is the wont of Unitarians, some of us went of to the local hostelry for

refreshment, and returned rather late, to find the doors locked! We knew that Tom had a room at the rear of the building and as he had not come with us we decided to throw pebbles at the window to rouse him. After quite a lot of missiles were thrown (it was a wonder that the glass stayed intact), Tom appeared and we begged him to go to the front door to let us in! Bless him, he did this without complaint, and hopefully nobody was any the wiser. It was at one of the annual Conferences of UALL that Tom asked me one day 'I'd like you to conduct my funeral if you would be so kind'. Well, Tom, I replied, I will do that with pleasure, but it had better not be yet! And it wasn't.

Tom was a regular visitor to Warwick to conduct services for us and he was much appreciated; his contributions to the discussions at the annual conferences of the Unitarian Association of Lay Leaders were thoughtful and heartfelt and in later years it was rather painful for members to watch his slow decline, both physically and mentally.

One of his last visits to Warwick was on a lovely sunny Sunday evening when we were holding our service in the garden at the Chapel, taking advantage of the weather, and he enjoyed this tremendously.

Tom's devotion to his group at Oldbury was legendary in the area; as they met in an old folk's home he had to take the hymn-books with him to services, and picked up quite a few of the congregation on the way. He really deserved a medal for then work he put into that group and for his commitment to the cause in the Midlands as a whole. He was President of the Midland Union from 1993 to 95 - a post which was well-earned and conducted with his usual aplomb.

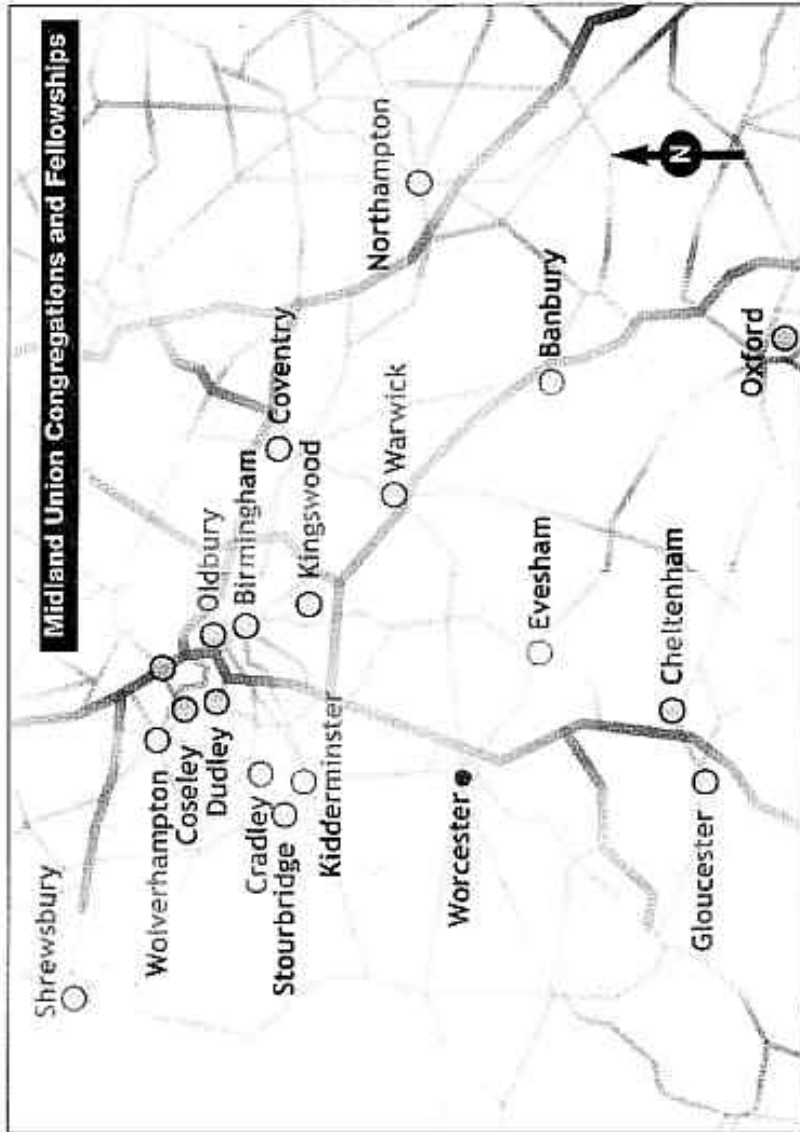
We all, the family, the Midland Union, and all his friends, will miss him greatly; he really put his faith into action and was an inspiration to us all. Rest in peace, old friend, you surely deserve it.

Malcolm Sadler
(from Warwick Unitarians' September newsletter)

LIST of CONGREGATIONS

Name	Contact	Details
Banbury	Elaine Normura	
Birmingham	Jill Hudson	
Cheltenham	Jenny Buckland	
Coseley	Helen J Emery	
Coventry	Janice Ashley	
Cradley	Rhona Homer	
Dudley	Barbara Russell	
Evesham	Lesley Harris	
Gloucester	David Wright	
Kidderminster	Roger Mathews	
Kingswood	Nina Caddick	
Northampton	Sue Woolley Note #1	
Oldbury	Pamela Rose	
Oxford	Catherine Robinson	
Shrewsbury	Marguerite Rossell	
Stourbridge	David Mearman	
Tamworth	Sandy Ellis	
Warwick	Malcolm Sadler	
Wolverhampton	Kenneth Russell	

Note #1: Sue Woolley is also Secretary and District Facilitator of the Midland Union.



The Midland Union website can be found at
www.midlandunion.org.uk



**“Each day comes bearing its own gifts.
 Untie the ribbons.”**

(Ruth Ann Schabacker)



Now you've reached the end of this issue, please write or email us with your ideas, letters and comments.

Contact details are inside the front page.

The SPRING 2009 Issue will be published in April.
 Please can we have your contributions on the theme of
'Worship'
 by **28th February 2009** for inclusion in this issue.

The theme for SUMMER 2009 will be **'What inspires you?'**
 We welcome contributions from **all** our readers.