

# MU NOW

MAGAZINE OF THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

## **'INSPIRATION' issue**



### *'elargissez dieu'*

The motto from Diderot which is repeated in  
Oxford Chapel's stained glass

Roughly translated, it means

*'Make God bigger', or  
'Open your mind  
to expand your concept of the Divine'*

From Oxford Unitarians' website  
<http://www.oxford-unitarians.org.uk/stainedglass.shtml>

ISSUE 27

SUMMER ISSUE

AUGUST 2009

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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. You make our task much easier.

Our next edition is due for publication in December 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 **31<sup>st</sup> October 2009** to:

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## From the Editor's Desk

Are you inspired by your Church and your time of worship? Would what your Church offers inspire someone to come and stay? Do you really notice the place you attend, the good and the bad; we can become very unobservant about the familiar.

A scruffy entrance, rubbish, ancient faded posters, out of date information, an air of neglect. Not all of these things take money, just a few moments of your time could make a difference, we cannot assume someone else will do everything. If your place of worship does not exert a stimulating and beneficial effect on you, does not animate and invigorate, it must be time for change.

I would be the first to admit that the exterior of the building used by Cheltenham Unitarians would not inspire anyone. The approach is marred by the trade refuse bins of the adjacent restaurant, and if we don't keep on top of it, we would be buried in cigarette ends. However, following a recent meeting I organised for my WI in our building, and the visit from several Welsh congregations, we know that our interior does provide a good atmosphere. Bayshill is fortunate to be able to afford to keep the interior well decorated, with attractive curtains, and comfortable red upholstered chairs.

I know the MUA does not lack inspirational worship leaders. Taking regular services must be a daunting task. Each member of the congregation has different needs, and these change over time as we face the ups and downs in our lives. For many of the congregations a visitor is a rare occurrence, and that days' meeting may not be what they were looking for.

Our challenge must always be to be an inspiration to everyone who comes. That is the responsibility of each one of us.

We hope you will be inspired to write on **'New Beginnings'** for our next edition in December; new year, new name, new start, whatever you like. For the April 2010 edition, we will be asking for your ideas on topics for services - and why you chose them!

With best wishes, Jenny. ☺



## President's Musings

So many things inspire me, simple chapels, cathedrals, forests, mountains, camping in the Lake District, a walk around Tarn Hows, the edge of a desert in North Africa and the Troodos Mountains of Cyprus but for now I will stay with one theme and it is that of music.

Three experiences introduced me to a widespread love of music, music that has inspired me over a lifetime.

The first was as a small boy whilst listening to the radio on the old BBC Home Service. In the middle of a programme called ITMA they had an interlude during which Charles Shadwell and his Orchestra played all kinds of music and it enthralled me. The music ranged from light classics to arrangements of nursery rhymes and folk songs.

The second came after following Harry Harrison who went down our street carrying a huge brass instrument, a Bb Bass, he walked up the stairs of a works canteen and I sat at the foot of those stairs to hear the Horwich Railway Mechanics' Institute Band playing the Introduction to Act Three of Lohengrin; it was the most exciting music I had ever heard and gave me a life long love of Brass Bands.

The third experience was when a quartet from the Hallé Orchestra came to our Grammar School and their playing enthralled me. Years later whilst at the Unitarian College I was able to hear Sir John Barbirolli conduct the whole orchestra in Manchester.



Over a ministry of many years I have realised how powerful music can be in times of joy and sorrow. Whenever conducting a funeral I usually say, *"Now let us bring memories of our friend as we listen to the kind of music that he/she enjoyed."* It is then that the deepest emotions appear.

Peter Hewis.

## MU District Facilitator: spring-summer update

Hello again. The first half of 2009 has been quite busy for me. Here's a summary of what I've been doing, around the Midland Unitarian Association.

You should now be getting quite used to seeing the monthly **MUA-wide Preaching Plan**, with **Bits & Pieces** on the back, which contains news of past events around the District, 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, and Shrewsbury. As I said last time – please keep them coming! (Ed: And please send your MU Now editors a copy, too!)

**Leading worship around the Midland Unitarian Association:** By the time you read this I will have led a dozen services around the MUA during the Spring and Summer of 2009. My diary for the rest of the year is filling up, so if you would like me to take a service in your church / chapel (particularly in the second half of the year), please get in touch. As a GA-qualified lay preacher, I am also available for rites of passage, should you wish it.

**The Spring Training**, on the topic *Creating a Vibrant Spiritual Community through Small Groups Ministries*, took place on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> May, again at Kingswood. It was led by Rev. Jim Robinson of Hampstead, and proved to be a fascinating and enlightening day.

Which brings us on to **Autumn Training**. The Midland Unitarian Association of Lay Preachers & Service Leaders are offering a day on *Prayer and Meditation*, to be led by our own Rev. Ant Howe, and Rev. Sarah Tinker (minister at Kensington). If you would like to book a place, please get in touch.

**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 Black Country Unitarians website (covering Dudley, Oldbury and Wolverhampton) went live in June. The MUA website is still your number one source for up-to-date information about the Midland Unitarian Association.

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.

The Publicity Workshop, which happened on 20<sup>th</sup> June at Unitarian New Meeting Church Birmingham, also went very well. 24 Unitarians from around the Midlands turned up to learn about how to put together a newsletter, how to deal with the media, how to attract newcomers and how to design and maintain a website.

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

Sue Woolley  
District Facilitator, MUA

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## The MUA always stands ready to help

Fortunately, it is rarely called upon – and for that reason may be easily overlooked – but the Rule 11 of the MUA Constitution enables the Executive Committee to intercede if difficulties arise between a congregation and its Minister. If requested to do so by either Party, it may appoint a Consultative Committee to counsel the Parties and attempt to resolve the difficulties amicably.



The rule reads as follows:-

### 11. THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee shall have power to appoint a Consultative Committee, consisting of two Ministers and two lay-persons for the purpose of giving counsel in case of difficulty, at the request of either the congregation or the Minister of an affiliated Church

Sandy Ellis

## Highlights from around the Churches

**Bayshill, Cheltenham** is a member of the Cotswold Group which has expanded to include five congregations - a challenging task for one Minister. Three congregations worship in Quaker Meeting Houses, so they cannot have morning services. When Cirencester moved from an evening to an afternoon service, and as Rev. Don Phillips cannot be in more than one place at once, it was suggested it was time for us to experiment with some morning services, something which has not been done for many years. In June we had our third morning service. All have been well attended, and several of us have enjoyed lunch and conversation afterwards. We are pleased to discover how well we can adapt to changing needs, and that change can lead to unexpected benefits. May we continue to be gathered joyfully together, inspired by each others company in a time of worship when we are reminded that there is more to life than the very materialistic world we tend to be absorbed into.

July and August have been exciting months for us with a visit from the South East Wales Unitarian Society and a naming ceremony. We really enjoyed preparing for our visitors, and as a small congregation, it is very uplifting to worship in a larger group. The more often we can welcome groups, the better we get at providing hospitality. Cheltenham is a lovely town to visit, so if any of the MUA Churches would like to have a day out, and join us for worship one Sunday, we should love to hear from you - but give us plenty of notice!

At present **Gloucester** Unitarians meet once a month at the Meeting House in Gloucester, but some of them certainly know how to travel, and you might bump into someone at Ross-on-Wye, Dudley, Stourbridge or Frenchay. Perhaps belonging to the Cotswold Group makes us more outward looking. Gloucester continues to support the Ross-on-Wye fellowship, which is thriving. For personal reasons, David Wright decided to relinquish his lay leadership role after April's service; members appreciate all his hard work over the last three years. But he doesn't get away that easily - he's taking September's service!

Peter Forder reports from **Evesham** that since the last issue of "MU Now" appeared in April, Evesham Unitarians have been pleased to welcome a new member. Sunday Worship, Friday Light and the Wednesday Inquirer's Group continue to be well-supported whilst socially, members have been particularly active. As well as two Social Evenings, the "Easter Parade" and "Salmon & Strawberries Supper", other events have included a Chocolate Morning, a Music Morning and a Garden Party. The annual

Asparagus Luncheon, hosted on behalf of the Ministers' Meeting occurred as usual on the second Wednesday in May. (Ed: See report on page 15)

A Music Morning is best described as a (self-service) Coffee Morning in which the hostess plays the piano. The event was the idea of Ann Stott, one of our occasional organists at Chapel, who is both an accomplished pianist and also the proud owner of a Steinway concert grand piano. The event raised £190.50 for the Send-a-Child-to-Hucklow Fund.

Not content with the joint hosting of the delightful Garden Party at their home, Tim & Elizabeth Smith have also been active separately: Elizabeth creating a fine floral display in the Chapel Garden and Tim arranging the overhaul of the Minister's Chair in the Chapel. Tim comments that this fully restored antique now has impeccable ecumenical credentials having been ministered to by a Catholic cabinet maker and a Quaker upholsterer!

**Cradley** has a well deserved reputation for providing a warm welcome when MUA events are held there, and many of us have enjoyed worshipping in their lovely chapel. In July the congregation held a flower service, and in August, a 'Songs of Praise'.

As were many non-conformist chapels, **Dudley** Old Meeting House is set back from the road, the entrance is flanked by Kentucky Fried Chicken (brings in an income, so hard to complain) and Parsons Hall Schoolroom which has been empty and boarded up for a number of years. Hopefully, in the not too distant future this lovely building will be converted into flats, which should improve security for the chapel and provide a more attractive approach. The excellent new sign on the wrought iron gates has encouraged new people to venture in, where I have no doubt they received a warm Black Country welcome. Essential floor repairs to ensure the pulpit did not demonstrate the laws of gravity have been carried out, and the ceiling in the toilets is now back in the correct position.



**Oldbury's** Annual Rose Service was held on 5<sup>th</sup> July, a shared event, with most of the congregation involved. The Church was beautifully decorated by Mrs. Pam Rose, chairman of the Black Country Group of Unitarian Churches. Each window sill bore a floral arrangement and a card with the name of a past member or of a dedicated Service Leader.

Pam opened the Service with a welcome to all, and lit the Chalice Candle with a remembrance of past members, a greeting to the present congregation, and a hope for the future. Miss Audrey Green, from Stourbridge, gave the Opening Prayer and Mr. David Mearman, also from Stourbridge, provided not only accompaniment for our hymns, but also a delightful composition of his own as interlude music. We enjoyed

Readings from Mr. Gavin Lloyd (Oxford) and from Mr. Ritchie Shaw (Oxford). After the singing and the reading we were glad of the customary tea and cakes and our thanks go to Mrs Irene Hickman (Dudley) and Miss Evelyn Cowley (Oldbury) for their help. The flowers were distributed to – and much appreciated by – the ladies of the congregation.

It is extremely important to share resources within the MUA, both material and human. (Your Editor's Saxo easily transports 10 upholstered chairs between Evesham and Cheltenham!) A willing group plan to join the tiny congregation at **Stourbridge** to help them clear up after the major renovation of their Church roof. It is hoped that a useful cheery meeting room can be created next to the Chapel.

Congratulations **Kidderminster**, increased membership means they have had to purchase more hymn books! Their Charity Fund raising is an example to us all; in their July/August newsletter it was reported that so far this year £421 was raised for the Wyre Forest Alzheimer's Society and £372 for the Church building repairs and maintenance fund. Does anyone have any good quality toys, fancy goods, books, CD, DVDs etc that they could get to Kidderminster for their "Bring & Buy" & "Bric-a-Brac" Stall? They need all the support they can get as they battle with continuous vandalism, which includes broken windows, smashed bottles on the drive, broken car barrier, attempted break-ins, smashed notice boards, a drain pipe wrenched off the wall and the rear door of the vestry smashed in - and at the MUA Executive meeting, Ann Latham reported yet another broken window. Meanwhile, the repairs for dry rot progress well and a quiet room is being created out of the vestry. Kidderminster are now pleased to welcome the Spiritualist Church who have rented the Pearsall Room for meetings and services every week on Thursday and Sunday evenings, 7 - 9pm.

**Shrewsbury** is one of the six MUA Churches that meets every Sunday for worship. Recent years have seen great improvements in their building, so it has been a major disappointment to discover that the roof repairs in 2003 were sub-standard despite the "professionals" being employed. This has led to further work, and sadly the opportunity to host two Darwin events was lost. The planned removal of pews at the back of the Church has been delayed by these problems. The Spiritualist Church has not been able to hold its meetings, which adds loss of income to the congregation's difficulties. Despite this the congregation is growing, and an EGM is being arranged to amend the constitution so that more people can serve on the committee.

Change is in the air at **Birmingham** New Meeting, starting with the Calendar, as their editor was inspired by the recent publicity workshop.

On 3rd Sundays in addition to the 11:00 a.m. service, there is a new style meeting at 3:00 p.m. for those people not so comfortable with the traditional hymn sandwich. In June, the chairs were placed in a horseshoe shape, there was recorded music and a short film. Participants sang a chant, said prayers, and were invited to speak upon the service theme. The newly formed social action group have started a mother and toddler group led by Verena. At Birmingham the practical aspects of Church life, maintenance of the buildings, finances etc are looked after by the Vestry Committee. So that anyone who comes knows who's who and who does what, a list of Vestry members, hopefully with photographs, will be displayed, and Chairman Owen Beale appeals to everyone for ideas on ensuring that everyone is made to feel welcome.

There is also change at **Kingswood**. Bob Edwards has retired as Chairman after 30 years and Karen Burns will be Chairperson until she moves from the district. The congregation is never below 30, and can be 50, and the monthly communion service is increasingly popular. The MUA Garden Party on August 1st was not blessed with perfect weather - your Editor admits that the 90 mile round trip on a very wet afternoon deterred the representatives from Bayshill from attending. Those who did brave the rain, mostly local people from Kingswood, retreated to the schoolroom to enjoy a feast and good companionship. For August 15th there were plans for a picnic in the chapel garden, followed by a musical evening when it is hoped the weather was more considerate.

Those of us unable to attend the funeral of Janice Ashley, at **Coventry** on 4<sup>th</sup> August, were there in spirit (see Memories, Page 40). On behalf of us all, I should like to thank our District Facilitator Sue Woolley for doing so much to help and support Janice Ashley throughout her illness. How Sue manages to pack so many things into one day is a wonder to us all, and we are very grateful to Sue for everything that she does. The members of Coventry's small congregation have much to think about as they decide on the best way forward with their building and adjust to the absence of Janice, and benefit from the part-time ministry provided by Rev. Jeffrey Bowes.

**Northampton** have redesigned their quarterly newsletter which is extremely attractive and informative. In addition to their twice monthly services led by a fascinating variety of leaders, they hold a monthly discussion evening with some very challenging topics, including on September 1st, "How free-range is Unitarianism?"

Weekly services at **Warwick** are well attended. During July the Chapel participated in the Warwick Gardens Day, which attracted great interest. They look forward to opening for National Heritage Weekend (September

11-13) and on 25th September: will be serving coffee for the Worlds Biggest Coffee Morning (10-12 Noon) in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support. The Chapel is also open every Friday 10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. with a short lunch-time service. Just in case that is not enough activity, there is also Boules in the Garden, or Carpet Bowls indoors.

The **Banbury** Fellowship held a successful social event in July, when several members of the congregation met in the home of one of their number for coffee, cake and a chat. The congregation would like to hold more events, but find the lack of their own premises makes this difficult. New people have attended the service held on 4th Sundays, and the Fellowship has an excellent relationship with the Town Hall where they meet.

Worshippers in the Chapel at Harris Manchester College **Oxford** are surrounded by some wonderful examples of man's artistry and skill, and they do not have to concern themselves with the fabric of the building. Unfortunately this advantage comes with some disadvantages. The Chapel Society only has access to the building and car park until 1:00 p.m. on Sunday which has made it more difficult to provide hospitality for a visiting preacher. On July 26th Jan Laker, a member of the congregation and a celebrant ordained by the Sufi Order UK to lead services of universal worship, led a service in which six faiths were represented. There is to be a retreat on Saturday 22nd August at St. Ethelwold's House, on the banks of the Thames in Abingdon. It's a nice problem to have, a congregation so large that Oxford members are encouraged to wear name tags; few of us have mastered the skill of listening to a new name and remembering it when introduced.

#### **Editor's note:**

If you are thinking, 'I don't like the entry for us in "Highlights from around the Churches"', I can only apologise, but our request for entries for this section has had little response, so I have done my best. So, if you do not like what you read, the remedy is in your hands. To add to our problems we still do not receive regular newsletters from the Churches that we know do have one. A good newsletter should be a top priority for each Church or Group so that they are available for any visitor. There is a temptation to swamp people with too much information and literature on their first visit, but a newsletter can and should contain everything a first timer would need to know. Please make sure the MU Now Editor is on your mailing list.

Jenny Buckley

## Dates for your diary

### **Midland Unitarian Association Annual Lunch**

**When:** Saturday 31st October 2009  
**Where:** Kingswood Meeting House, B47 5DQ  
**Time:** 10.30 for 11.00 am

**Guest Speaker:** Rev. Bob Wightman, President of the General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches.

Secretaries have been sent the menu and booking form for this occasion. Let's make it a bumper attendance!

*Further details from Sue Woolley, tel 01604 870746  
or e-mail [sue.woolley@virgin.net](mailto:sue.woolley@virgin.net)*

### **Training opportunities**

#### **MUA of Lay Preachers & Service Leaders Autumn Training: Prayer and Meditation**

**When:** Saturday 10th October 2009  
**Where:** Kingswood Meeting House B47 5DQ  
**Times:** 10.30 am - 4.15 pm (tea/coffee from 10.00)

This training session will be led by Rev. Ant. Howe (Kingswood & Warwick) & Rev. Sarah Tinker (Kensington)

*Please bring your own lunch. [More details from Sue Woolley.](#)*

#### **Sharing the Spiritual Journey Through Diverse Group Activities: training for Facilitators and Would-be Facilitators**

**Where:** Luther King House, Manchester M14 5JP  
**When:** Friday 16th October - Saturday 17th October  
**Time:** late Friday afternoon - Saturday lunchtime  
**Cost:** £25 per person  
including meals, accommodation & conference fee  
Send cheques, made payable to 'General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches' to Engagement Support, Essex Hall.  
First come, first served

*Further information from [info@unitarianengagementgroups.org.uk](mailto:info@unitarianengagementgroups.org.uk)*

## Anniversary Services

### Kidderminster - 227<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

**When:** Sunday 4th October 2009

**Where:** Unitarian New Meeting House, Church Street,  
Kidderminster

**Time:** 11.00 a.m.

Service will be led by Rev. Ann Latham

### Northampton - 182<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary

**When:** Sunday 27th September 2009

**Where:** 31, Hazelwood Road, Northampton

**Time:** 11.00 a.m.

Led by Mr. Jon Small, Chairman

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### Birmingham District Women's League Autumn Meeting

**When:** Saturday 17th October 2009

**Where:** Unitarian New Meeting Church, Ryland Street,  
Birmingham

**Time:** 11.00 a.m. to 2.30 p.m.

*Further details from Miss Ann Hughes;*

*e-mail: [annhughes999@aol.com](mailto:annhughes999@aol.com)*

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## National events

### Heritage Open Days

**When:** 10<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> September

Several of our buildings will be open to the public this weekend, including Warwick, Evesham and Oxford. It's also an opportunity to visit buildings which are not normally accessible.

*More information at your local tourist office, or at*

*<http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/>*

### Inter Faith Week

**When:** 15<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> November

More information on page 25

*Check your local press for details of events,*

*or go to <http://www.interfaithweek.org/index.htm>*

## Midland Unitarian Association events

### Creating a Vibrant Spiritual Community through Small Group Ministry Training Course Kingswood, 2nd May 2009

19 delegates from seven MUA congregations attended a whole-day training course about Small Group Ministry, led by the inspirational Rev. Jim Robinson of Hampstead.

After a spiritual opening session, to remind us that we are a spiritual community, not just a social club, we all "checked in", by sharing the wide variety of small groups that exist in our congregations. These included discussion, Friday Light, charity work, choir, rambling, retreats, Inquirer, small group worship, district work, and committees. We then shared what we appreciated about these small groups, and what the possible barriers were to them fulfilling their potentials.

Jim then took us through the basic principles of Small Group Ministry and Engagement Groups, including their intention, structure, engagement sharing principles, and facilitation. We learned that the reason for small groups is to deepen the spiritual life of the participants; to create community between them; to enable them to live in 'right relationship' with the rest of the world; and to deepen their connections with their church or chapel.

After lunch, we were taught how to listen to our fellow human beings, avoiding stereotyping ourselves and others. We were then invited to put this into practice, by splitting up into pairs, which was both fun and instructive. Then Jim took us through some of the practical issues of running an Engagement Group, about the meeting space; time questions; leadership; focus or purpose; the name of the group; the covenant between members; the structure of sessions; and the issues of problem behaviour and confidentiality.

The day was rounded off by a "check-out" session to balance the "check-in" in the morning, and a short spiritual closing.

We are all very keen to learn more about facilitation skills, and are hoping that Jim Robinson can be persuaded to run a course about this in the Autumn.

## **Asparagus Lunch Oat St Chapel, Evesham, 13th May 2009**

Friends from most of the MUA congregations met at Oat St Chapel, Evesham for the Annual Asparagus Lunch; or, to give it its full title, the *Warwickshire & Neighbouring Counties Monthly Meeting of Protestant Dissenting Ministers' Asparagus Lunch* !

In spite of the gloomy weather, it was a joyful occasion. The service beforehand was led by the President of the General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches, Rev. Bob Wightman, who spoke inspiringly about the importance of ministry of all kinds.

The lunch was up to the usual high standard, and had been splendidly organised by Dr. Peter Forder, Chairman at Evesham. One innovation for this year was the provision of e-tickets, with our names and menu choices on them, which made the waiting staff's job a lot easier.

The traditional toast to civil and religious liberty was proposed by Rev. Bob, and he was thanked by Rev. Keith Hill. Then Immediate Past President of the MUA, Mrs. Alison Thursfield, thanked the Ministers' Meeting for holding this Annual Lunch, and for their continuing witness through the centuries. Rev. Ant Howe thanked Oat St Chapel for their hospitality, and Dr. Peter Forder thanked the catering staff for the delicious meal.

## **Singing our Faith - the Ministers' Meeting Hymn Sing Kingswood, 13th June 2009**

Over 30 Midlands Unitarians gathered at Kingswood Meeting House on a warm and sunny Saturday afternoon, to join with Rev. Ant Howe and the talented choir and organist from Kingswood, to learn some hymns from the new purple hymn book, *Sing Your Faith*. The gathering had been organised by the Warwickshire & Neighbouring Counties Monthly Meeting of Protestant Dissenting Ministers, known to its friends as the Ministers' Meeting, to encourage Midlands congregations to give the new hymn book a try.

Ant and his helpers took us through nine new hymns, some of which were quite easy to sing, some of which were a bit trickier. We all

enjoyed the words of the new hymns, by talented contemporary Unitarians, and did our best to sing our faith loud and clear.

Then after a short break for tea and delicious cakes provided by the Kingswood congregation, Ant led us in a short service, using three of the hymns we had learned. All in all, it was an inspirational afternoon, and we left full of plans to use the new hymn book as soon as possible.

## **MUA Publicity Workshop Birmingham New Meeting, 20<sup>th</sup> June**

A highly successful Publicity Workshop was held at Birmingham New Meeting on Saturday 20th June. It was well supported, with 24 members attending from 13 MUA Congregations. The Workshop was led by Sue Woolley, the MUA District Facilitator, using a laptop and projector to give a very professional presentation using PowerPoint slides. Sue started the proceedings by inviting everyone to respond when meeting a stranger in a lift who spots the chalice badge and asks 'What are Unitarians?'

The day was then divided into four sessions. The two morning sessions were led by Sue. '*Publicity using people and buildings*' dealt with how to help visitors find your chapel, and then ensuring that it is attractive and welcoming, and '*Producing a Newsletter*' emphasised the importance of each congregation having a Newsletter both for the members and for informing visitors. Aspects of content, design, production and distribution were then discussed.

The first afternoon Session '*External Publicity*' was led by Guest Speaker Jim Corrigall who as well as being a member of the GA Executive Committee, is also a professional journalist. He explained how to write News Articles and Press Releases, the effective use of photographs and how to give a radio interview. The final session '*Building & maintaining a website*' was again led by Sue who explained how to design and construct an effective congregational website designed to attract new members, and emphasized the importance of regularly updating it to maintain its impact.

(Ed: Thanks go to MUA's website for these reports!)

## A happy celebration of fifty years of service

A large crowd of friends from eight different MUA Congregations gathered at Warwick on Sunday 17th May to join in a Service of Celebration marking fifty years of service to Warwick Unitarians by Malcolm Sadler. The service was conducted by the Rev. Ant. Howe and accompanied on the piano by Malcolm.

The Chapel was a different place when Malcolm first joined it in 1959, said Ant, with traditional pews, inadequate heating, a crumbling fabric and a dwindling congregation. Ant then invited Malcolm to describe some of the musical events which followed his arrival.

Malcolm explained that he had been the organist at Waverley Road Church when he was invited to move to Warwick. In those days, the old pipe organ stood at the south end of the chapel and playing it created a loud howling sound from the blower motor situated in a corrugated iron shed in the garden outside. It had to be switched off after each hymn to avoid complaints from the neighbours. The organ gave up the ghost in mid-hymn during the second time that he played it, necessitating the use of a piano to complete the hymn! It was replaced with a smaller portable instrument which is still present in the upper room.

In the ensuing years, he was able to recruit a series of musical ensembles to enliven the services and when it became impossible to recruit a minister, he accepted appointment as Lay Leader himself. There followed a long struggle stretching over many years to complete a massive programme of renovation which involved replacing the ceiling, removing the pews, replacing the floor, redecorating the chapel in bright colours, creating a new kitchen and reclaiming the now beautiful garden behind the chapel. Three flats were created in the adjacent building to form the basis of future income.



Malcolm Sadler

Ant said that without Malcolm's determined leadership over so many years, the congregation was unlikely to have survived. He pointed out, that, not content with these Herculean efforts on behalf of the congregation, Malcolm had made a significant contribution at both District and National level, being a Past President of the Midland District, Secretary of the District Ministers' Meeting, and Secretary for many years of the Unitarian Association of Lay Leaders. He then read letters of congratulation from the President of the General Assembly, the President of the Midland Unitarian Association and from the Rev. John Clifford, a former Minister of the congregation and handed over a thick batch of additional congratulatory cards.

At the conclusion of the service, the congregation offered drinks and refreshments whilst those present swapped memories and reminiscences.

Sandy Ellis

## Preparing and conducting a service - *from Oxford's newsletter*

What talent we have in our Chapel Society! That was obvious at the end of three evening sessions on the above theme, conducted by Revd Peter Hewis, Emeritus Chaplain of Harris Manchester College, for lay members of our congregation. The first session dealt with purposes, topics, materials and sources; it ended with practice in using voices in the chapel without a microphone. (We should never depend on things that can go wrong!) In the second session participants considered outlining and writing a sermon, collectively brainstormed some ideas, then moved into the chapel to practise speaking *with* a microphone.

On the final evening practical points were considered, including watching out for pitfalls on the way to the pulpit, choosing hymns of varying metres, and making sure that the chalice can be lit. One participant was unavoidably absent, but the other seven then gave ten-minute talks. Each talk was fascinating, and worthy of expansion into a whole service. The speakers deserved their glass of wine or fruit juice at the end of the sessions.

*Other members of the congregation have attended tutorials given by the Tutor in Ministerial Training, Revd Dr Arthur Stewart. We are grateful to Arthur for including them, and to the college for allowing us the use of facilities for both events.— Peter Hewis*

## **Not the MUA outing to Styal Mill ... !**

Disappointed that the MUA outing to Styal Mill was cancelled due to lack of support, and at a loose end one Sunday in July, I decided to go by myself.

I arrived at the Unitarian Chapel in the village in time for morning worship, but found that the service was at 6:00 p.m., so I am unable to cross Norcliffe Chapel off my growing list of Unitarian churches visited.



Norcliffe Chapel

*Photo by Sue Adair*

<http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/394152>

Then to Styal Mill itself, where I was told I could have a guided tour of the Apprentices' Hall at 12 noon, so I went up a hill in a quaint buggy to this highspot of the trip. We were greeted by an excellent guide dressed in Victorian costume, who really brought to life the harsh conditions in which these young people lived. There were, for example, fifty girls sleeping in one dormitory.

The Greg family who owned the mill had a Unitarian tradition (Ed: They built Norcliffe Chapel), and did treat their workers a little less awfully than some of their counterparts in Manchester. Some attempt was made to educate them and they were allowed unlimited porridge at breakfast and porridge flavoured with onions and carrot at lunch.

After a picnic in the delightful grounds I toured the mill itself. The complex processes involved in the manufacture of cotton cloth were arefully explained. Much of the machinery is still in working order and demonstrations are given to make the atmosphere really authentic.

I do realise that it is a long way for some of our MUA congregations to go for a day out, but I do recommend a visit if possible.

Hazel Reynolds (UNM, Birmingham)

## **General Assembly meetings, Chester, 15th to 18th April 2009.**

No less than 20 MUA people attended the recent GA meetings, including two ministers, three retired ministers and the District Facilitator. Nine of our 18 congregations were represented. There was the usual plethora of meetings and workshops to choose from, quite apart from the business meetings, and the big set-piece events of the Opening Celebrations and Anniversary Service. The Growth session on the Friday was rather better organised than last year, with delegates from two adjacent districts getting together to swap ideas and share good practice. It will all appear on the GA website in due course.

But the highlight of the meetings for me was the presentation by Rev. Jane Dwinnell of the UUA, who delivered an inspiring talk about how to manage and grow small congregations. I was one of the fortunate few who managed to pick up her book *Big Ideas for Small Congregations* before the bookstall sold out, and it is crammed with good ideas. Watch this space!

Sue Woolley

*And here are impressions of GA by two first-time visitors ...*

### **The Newbie Boldly Goes: General Assembly 2009 Report from Northampton's newsletter**

First Fig – Edna St. Vincent Millay

*My candle burns at both ends;*

*It will not last the night;*

*But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends –*

*It gives a lovely light!*

My first GA, what can I say? It was inspiring, overwhelming but great fun too. I had been told that exhaustion was a real possibility, nay, probability, and indeed, as prophesied, so it was! Sue (Woolley) – thank-you for the warning!

So, what was it about a few days in Chester that could have caused such a state? Well, with a packed GA schedule combined with the eagerness of the first-timer to experience everything, it was perhaps inevitable. I was quite determined to attend all the early morning

worship sessions (7.30 a.m. start) and I did achieve this despite the allure of relaxing in the amazingly well-priced Student Union bar until the wee hours, well, maybe close to the witching hour anyway! I do think that Cliff Reed might help us first-timers out here perhaps, with a variation on his Unitarian classic 'Sleep – What's That?'

I loved the evening worship too, the opening ceremony and anniversary service especially. I thought perhaps, being a newcomer was the reason for my attitude of looking for the positive in what I heard and saw and that critique was natural for seasoned veterans. I didn't expect that Unitarian principles of diversity and tolerance would promote the negativity I encountered on occasions regarding any and every aspect of the GA. I wondered why did some people feel the need to criticise so much, when there was so much to applaud in people's motives and intentions? Not that critique isn't important.

Clearly, the venue and catering were souring the mood for many, with much wistfulness for the superior venue of 2008, Hatfield. Some clearly had reason to be upset with blocked drains and other serious grievances. But the near constant whinging at meal-times I found quite draining. I am sad to confess some disappointment in my fellow Unitarians. Yes, it was poor service but we are blessed to be able to be here, aren't we? So my humble prayer is 'let's make the best of it!'

This attitude extended to the EC who seemed to be targets for ire with a piece in the co-incidental publication of The Inquirer and comments in the GA Zette. The focus seemed less on the issues and more on needless personal attacks. Indeed, someone commented to me that the Zette was a puppy compared to formerly and they were missing a more scurrilous publication. I thought, if there's corruption, fine, but, if not, you want scurrilous for the sake of it? Joyce Ashworth, the retiring President, who, with her easy grace and warmth was a joy to listen to, was also disappointed with the negative atmosphere and mentioned it in her speech, although she was attacked for this too as abuse of privilege and platform!

Anyway, back to the positive, I say! I particularly enjoyed all the singing and attended the hymn workshop where there were many hearty voices singing from the new and very purple hymnbook, a

copy of which I brought back. I didn't have the confidence to present myself as a choir candidate but, perhaps if I go next year, I will, as I now know there are no auditions!

Sue very kindly looked out for me over the time at Chester as I had been apprehensive beforehand but I'm glad to say with some, hopefully justified confidence, that I negotiated my own way quite often after settling in. However, I was always glad to see her familiar smile in the Molloy Hall or at meal-times, although I do know a few MU faces now, which really helped me feel less isolated. Sue also introduced me to dozens of people, including the wonderfully funny and down-to-earth Shammy. Thank-you Sue for all your care and guidance at Chester as well as driving there and back.



Joanne  
(on left)  
and Sue  
working  
out  
where to  
go next  
at GA...

Photo by  
Shammy  
Webster

The business meetings were more amusing than I'd expected with some great debates and some serious heckling, (particularly with regard to the PA system or human error in the use thereof!). Sadly the increasing stuffiness of the Molloy Hall, was not proving conducive to firing up the grey matter requisite for these slots, at least for me!

The Growth Day was another positive with Jane Dwinell's spot on growing congregations really well received. She seemed to have the power of defying the stuffiness of the Molloy Hall and generated

some much needed inspiration and energy amongst those present. For most, this energy lasted into the workshops, and although the one that I attended was productive, the mood, unfortunately, was rather flat.

The book stall was full of goodies but with a budget I decided to go minimal and just purchased Stephen Lingwood's book, 'The Unitarian Life', as recommended by Sue. I have found this a wonderful book to dip into – it is an anthology of pieces by Unitarians on diverse aspects of life. It has come in useful already as I have selected a prayer by Alistair Bates from it for my 'This Airy Cathedral' service.

I can truthfully say I enjoyed almost everything the GA had to offer, (bar the moaning!) and even when I wasn't, I was still learning (perhaps, especially, not to put my fellow Unitarians on the pedestal of perfect courtesy at meal-times!). It was great to hear, and see, in some cases, with presentations from several congregations, what others were doing – much inspiration to take back to Northampton, both for services and, hopefully, for growth, in depth and breadth.

The theme for 2010 is 'Youth' and should it prove welcome, I believe I should be happy to be a delegate for Northampton again. Many, many thanks to the committee – for nominating and sponsoring me to go to GA 2009 and providing the opportunity to learn so much.

Joanne McGeehan

### ***And from UNM Birmingham's newsletter ...***

#### **Xaymca's First GA Visit**

Straight away, when we got there, my mom took me to the Primary Base building where all the kids were. We watched half a movie. Then we went outside to play and after watched the rest of the movie. Then we went for dinner which was disgusting and I never want to have it again.

On day 2, we made masks, painted them and practised the story of the Mouse and a Frog with our teachers, John Harley, Claire Maddock and Mel Prideaux. Connie and I played in the sand pit. It was lots of fun because we made lots of sandcastles. Then we played hangman. Again, dinner was the same as the first day.

Friday was the best day because we went to Chester Zoo. We saw lots of animals and the monkeys were entertaining because they were showing off. We saw some bats too and they were flying over people's heads. I brought a toy mouse which my mom calls Mousey, but I call Maurice the Mouse. We all had ice-cream because it was a hot day. My feet were killing me after because we had to walk around the big zoo. We took the bus back to the GA. At the closing ceremony, we juniors acted out the story. I was a Water-rat and I wore the mask I made with John. The ceremony was long and I don't remember much of it because I fell asleep.

On Saturday, our last day, we played in the sandpit, watched movies and played outside. I was happy to leave the GA because no more dungeon bedroom or bad food. But I was sad too because I will miss all my friends and the teachers. However, I will see some of them at Junior Weekend and I have addresses and email address of some of my friends.

Xaymca Barnes-Gordon

**(Ed:** Xaymca's name is pronounced ZA-MAKE-A. The word is from the Arawak Indians, the indigenous people of Jamaica. The motto of Jamaica is "out of many one people" and her mother (Winnie Gordon) named her Xaymca Erin because her family forebears were from Ireland, Scotland, China, India, North Africa and Israel as well as Jamaica. Winnie says: 'I wanted her to remember that our background may be many but we are still one people.')

#### **Unitarian Women's League**

At the AGM of the Unitarian Women's League at Chester on Thursday 16th April, a cheque for £11,000 was presented to Russell Richards of SightSavers International from the 2008/9 project.

The project for 2009/10 is Meningitis UK - for further information contact Ann Hughes, National Secretary (details below), or look on the Women's League Website;

<http://www.unitariansocieties.org.uk/womensleague/index.html>

Anyone interested in joining any of our meetings should contact me at 0121-525-1123 or email [Annhughes999@aol.com](mailto:Annhughes999@aol.com)

Ann Hughes - District and National Secretary of UWL

**(Ed:** We hear that Kingswood's newly-formed branch continues to flourish, and Oxford's branch had a very successful garden party.)

## Inter Faith Week

The week of 15<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> November 2009 has been designated Inter Faith Week. There will be a national 'launch event' the previous week, on 12<sup>th</sup> November.

This is the first UK-wide Inter Faith Week, though there has been a previous one in Scotland. It will include and highlight activities organised by bodies around the country, with the aim of:-

- Promoting good inter faith relations
- Highlighting the contribution of faiths to building community
- Increasing understanding between faiths and wider society.



## New interfaith initiative

**Dr Taj Hargey**, Chair of the Muslim Educational Centre of Oxford (and a good friend of our congregation there, from whose newsletter this comes) has been conducting ceremonies of marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men. The local press quoted Dr Hojjat Ramzy, a local Islamic registrar, as saying:-

*"It is not allowed under any circumstances for a Christian man to marry a Muslim woman. It is not acceptable and it is not right."*

But Taj claims that there is no injunction against it in the Koran, and that the prohibition is cultural, rather than religious.

*"Islam allows Muslim men to marry non-Muslim women, and such marriages are common, but I am one of the only people who will do it the other way round."*

He requires couples to sign five non-negotiable conditions protecting the woman's faith, and to agree to counselling before he will conduct the rite. So far nearly 40 couples have come to Oxford from many countries in Europe to be married by Taj.

## An international ambassador

Like any bird, the endangered lesser kestrel does not recognize political boundaries, ethnic or religious differences.

Two men wanted to save the bird — Nader Al-Khateeb, the founder and president of a Palestinian environmental protection group, and Dan Alon, who directs an ornithological group in Jerusalem. They came from different worlds, warring worlds. The two men met, filled with fears

and apprehension, yet they were able to develop a working relationship for the preservation of this bird. Their plan was to have children build birdhouses. Together they raised over \$40,000 for the project but the hard part was yet to come. Both the Israeli government and Palestinian parents were wary.

It was decided the children would meet in the desert, where the kestrels feed. An old monastery was found in a secure area and a dozen Jewish children and a dozen Palestinian children were taken there. On the bus, the children wouldn't look at each other or talk to each other. On arrival, they refused to play with each other. It was looking like it would be a dismal failure. Then a bird flew by.

In Arabic, someone yelled, "Kestrel!"

Then, in Hebrew, someone yelled, "Kestrel!"

Conversation takes place in English:

"You can borrow my binoculars."

"Hey, there's another bird!"

By the end of the day, a little Jewish girl says to a little Arab girl, 'I have nine cats... They sleep with me at night.'

They were talking. It was a beginning ... due to a bird, an international ambassador.

## Of Tim Berners Lee

Catherine Robinson's recent 'Face to Faith' article in the Guardian\* mentioned Tim Berners-Lee, the Unitarian pioneer of the World Wide Web who declined to patent his invention and thus made no personal profit from it. This prompted a reader to respond:

"Tim and I were contemporaries at Oxford, and we had many friends in common. I remember that in 1975 he took me to his college room to show me the word-processor he had built, saying 'If only I could get hold of an old teletype machine, I might be able to print out the results!' And I remember him bringing his guitar on a punting expedition, and my being particularly impressed because he could sing American Pie and Alice's Restaurant all the way through. So the seeds of IT innovation and social justice were already sprouting even then!"

\* Catherine's article was printed on 28 March 2009 (still available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/mar/28/unitarian-tim-berners-lee?showallcomments=true>)

## Coffee break (Part 1)

*The Washington Post's "Style Invitational" asks readers to take any word from the dictionary, alter it by adding, subtracting or changing one letter, and supply a new definition. Like this:*



**Inoculate** (v.): To take coffee intravenously

**Cashtration** (n.): The act of buying a house, which renders the subject financially impotent for an indefinite period.

**Giraffiti** (n.): Vandalism spray-painted very, very high.

**Decafalon** (n.): The gruelling event of getting through the day consuming only things that are good for you.

**Dopeler effect** (n.): The tendency of stupid ideas to seem smarter when they come at you rapidly.

**Arachnoleptic fit** (n.): The frantic dance performed just after you've accidentally walked through a spider web.

**Caterpallor** (n.): The colour you turn after finding half a grub in the fruit you're eating.

*The Washington Post also asks readers to supply alternate meanings for common words. Here's a selection of entries...*

**Coffee** (n.): The person upon whom one coughs.

**Flabbergasted** (adj.): Appalled over how much weight you have gained.

**Abdicate** (v.): To give up all hope of ever having a flat stomach.

**Esplanade** (v.): To attempt an explanation while drunk.

**Gargoyle** (n.): Olive-flavoured mouthwash.

**Balderdash** (n.): A rapidly receding hairline.

**Ed:** *Can our readers do better?*

*Send your entries to us - using existing words or slightly amended ones as above - and we'll publish the best ones...*

## What inspires us - your views

### What Inspires me?

Inspiration is hard to define. It comes in many guises, with individuals responding in varied ways to an occurrence. Almost anything can inspire someone!

"Inspiration" means an intake of breath. Something penetrates our consciousness, perhaps firing us up as bellows re-ignite a dying fire. Inspiration, to me, is something that gives purpose to life; stimulates endeavour; makes us want to get involved – and fills us with joy. It is the WOW factor which changes the ordinary into something else.

We may experience this in a crowd through rhetoric – Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech still inspires its hearers. Often music inspires – either as a performer or as an auditor; and I found inspiration just watching the Paralympics and marvelling how disabilities have been overcome so joyfully.

Inspiration can also come from the quiet moment – a sunset; a book; the scents and sounds of a summer evening, the company of a friend. This is the "still, small voice" that stimulates awareness of the ordinary, yes, but that the ordinary can become something more.

Inspiration may come through worship, either receiving thought-provoking ideas or sitting in silent meditation. Being part of a worshipping community where friendships grow and laughter is never far below the surface – but where there is serious endeavour too – that can be inspirational. A community where any problems and differences are faced, accepted, and subsumed in the whole.

I love the words of Dag Hammarskjöld: "Each morning we must hold out the chalice of our being to receive, to carry, and to give back."

What do I receive each day? The Spirit of Life breathing anew into my being, inspiring me to action, however mundane. I try to carry that Inspiration with me. Then, with awareness, I hope to pass something on to others by sharing the gifts and insights I receive. And it is in this sharing and giving back that Inspiration turns to Joy.

Alison Thursfield, Cheltenham

## What inspires me

At the south end of Cemetery Ridge above the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, stands a small hill named 'Little Round Top'. It was here, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 1863 that a man named Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain won the Medal of Honour for his outstanding courage in leading his Regiment, the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, in repelling repeated attacks by General Robert E. Lee's Confederate Army. Lawrence Chamberlain was not a regular soldier, he was a Professor of Rhetoric from Bowdoin College, Brunswick in the State of Maine. Chamberlain was a man of liberal views who detested slavery, but for the first two years of the American Civil War he yielded to the pressure from his peers urging him not to become involved in the War.

Eventually, in 1862 he took leave of absence and joined up without telling them. His natural ability, formidable intellect and distinguished conduct at the battle of Fredericksburg, led to his being appointed to command of his Regiment just before the battle of Gettysburg. He served throughout the remainder of the war, being wounded five times, having his obituary published twice and being promoted to Brigadier General for gallantry on the field of battle at Petersburg, where his bravery even inspired cheers from the other side ! He was chosen by General Grant to accept the surrender of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House in 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1865 and his spirit of generosity in calling his brigade to attention and saluting the gallantry of the defeated Confederate Army was a significant factor in starting the process of reconciliation between North and South. He earned further praise for his sympathetic treatment of the civilians under his command during the post-war occupation of the South.

He went on to become Governor of Maine for an unprecedented four terms, and retired to become Director of Bowdoin College, living until 1914. Chamberlain's intellect, bravery and above all his great humanity, are an immense inspiration to me to strive for the standards by which he lived, and his life is still an inspiration to many others nearly a hundred years later.

Sandy Ellis, Evesham

## Inspiration

In spite of all the doom and gloom of life in Britain in the 21st century I still find much to inspire and admire if I take the trouble to look around me.

Firstly there are our children, who in spite of the frequent vilification they receive at the hand of our popular press, impress me with their freshness, openness, friendliness and their laughter. Watch a group of young children, unknown to one another, running around in a park playground and see how well they get on, how they react to one another and how they develop a sense of togetherness in a very short time. There's a lesson there for us all!

Talking of youngsters, I am often brought close to tears when I see the poor children of Africa and Asia on TV. I find great inspiration in seeing these children, who have no prospects, who lack all the basic amenities which we enjoy, smile their way through life and seem contented with their lot, miserable as it is. Their smiles are infectious and give hope for the future. We have much to learn from them.

Then there are some members of the older generation who are overwhelmed by tragedy and/or illness in their lives and who respond with great fortitude. No complaining from them, no demands for compensation for what has perhaps ruined their lives, but just sheer bravery and dignity in the face of insurmountable odds. What an example they set!

Bravery is also the mark of many of our soldiers abroad. Whether we agree with their mission or not, we can have nothing but admiration for their attitude. These men who risk their lives for the sake of others, who suffer sometimes dreadful injuries, but who just get on with their lives as best they can. Often confined to wheelchairs, many of them find an outlet in sporting activities that defy belief. No self-pity, no 'Why me?', just a determination to live life to the full as long as they can. Oh, I wish I had just one iota of their courage!

Finally, there are those who give selflessly of themselves for the benefit of others- nurses, doctors, some of them working for a

pittance in the war-torn areas of the world, and their many voluntary helpers. Carers of the elderly and sick at home and all those whose life aim it seems to be to make life easier for others. Some have a religious faith, others not, but all reveal that divine spirit we Unitarians believe exists in all people. Yes, there is certainly much to inspire and admire even today!

Graham Williams, Kidderminster

### **What inspires me?**

Having just returned from the GA Annual Meetings at Chester, the short answer to this question would be: being with other Unitarians, learning with and from them, and worshipping with them.

One particular presentation at the GA meetings inspired me enormously. It was by Rev. Jane Dwinnell, of the Unitarian Universalist Association, who is a specialist in small congregations. Mind you, the UUA definition of “small” (less than 150!!) doesn’t exactly match with the UK one (less than 10). But she reassured us that a considerable number (40%) of the UUA congregations have less than 50 members: “Small is OK” She also commented that we have a harder row to hoe than our American counterparts, because the USA is so much more of a religious country – about 50% of Americans attend church regularly, whereas the figure for the UK is nearer 5%. So we have to battle against a culture that is predominantly not interested in religion.

What follows is a transcript of the notes I took while she was speaking. I was lucky enough to be able to purchase her book *Big Ideas for Small Congregations* from the GA Bookstall in advance of her presentation – it had sold out long before she actually spoke! When you’ve read it, I think you will see why I found it inspiring!

We need to consider why growth? Because being a Unitarian is a wonderful thing – we need to spread the word. We need to be committed as a congregation to growing.

We need to decide on an aim: how large do you want to be? We need to make specific plans – how many more people, over what period of time. 10 – 15% is enough to aim for. Otherwise it could be too stressful. There is a need to regularly review and renew your vision.

### **CENTERING**

The first stage is to build foundations. We need to learn radical hospitality and welcoming in our congregations BEFORE carrying out a publicity drive.

A covenant is an excellent idea for bringing us together as a community. We need to be in harmony with each other before being able to welcome and integrate new people. We need to sort out how we communicate with each other; get money matters on a firm basis; sort out our priorities for our building and so on.

### **CONNECTING**

This is all about what we do together – worship, engagement groups. How we connect with each other and with districts and with the GA.

### **CREATING CHANGE**

This is the final stage – stepping out into the community – doing something in the world about social justice. We need to take our liberal faith out into the world and help people. We need to find out what people need – what gaps in provision there are in our local community – and do it. Serving your community is a great way to raise your profile.

### **GETTING THEM IN THE DOOR**

Jane stressed the importance of the internet – we all need to have fresh, relevant, up-to-date websites. All kinds of publicity can help.

Use your newsletter as a vehicle for welcoming newcomers – not just for internal consumption. Be careful about using acronyms – remember the newcomer. Also, don’t refer to people just by their first names – the newcomer won’t know who you’re talking about, and it gives a very exclusive, unwelcoming feel to the newsletter.

First impressions of the building: is it a welcoming space? Take a critical look at the inside of the building. Redecorate, spruce things up, change the artwork, rearrange the furniture. Are your signs and noticeboards clear and up-to-date? Are the toilets accessible? Clean? Well-stocked with loo roll, soap etc?

Worship: have your worship services at a consistent time. Every week if possible. And start and finish on time! Worship can be innovative – silence, readings and music. Not just the bog-standard

hymn sandwich. Be creative. Ring the changes. Mix and match types of worship experience. Persevere with innovations, but introduce them gradually – it takes people time to get used to it.

Use a printed order of service. The newcomer needs some guidance – it can be a nervous experience, walking into a church or chapel for the first time.

Put something about the dress code on your website – so that the newcomer can dress appropriately – nothing would be so embarrassing for them as being dressed up or dressed down when the rest of the congregation is the opposite!

Welcoming the stranger: there are many different reasons for newcomers to visit for the first time. Don't pressurise them in the early days. They have the right to just be ordinary members and not to participate in anything else.

Engagement groups can be the key to holding on to people – they offer an opportunity to grow deeply and spiritually. Have more than one group if possible, so that people can pick and choose what they join. Smaller groups are more intimate. More than eight people is too many – six or less is better.

#### DEALING WITH CHANGE COMFORTABLY

A huge thing to remember is that individuals and congregations have to be willing to change and be changed. You need to be willing to be experimental and to take risks. It may be uncomfortable at times, but we are a spiritual community, so we can share this.

Don't be afraid of failure. You need to evaluate a new project; then if it doesn't work, accept it and move on. Keep going; try something new.

But also, celebrate your successes – we're here to have fun as well!

To sum up: keep it simple. Have a quality Sunday experience, with worship and social time. Connecting and mission. You don't have to do anything else.

#### DISTRICT SUPPORT

It is vital to support one another in Districts. We are lucky here in the MUA, in that we have a good District Association that encourages cooperation and sharing best practice. Some ideas for doing this:

- Visit each other's churches and chapels
- Share worship leaders
- Work together on a mission project – social action
- Look at each other's websites and read each other's newsletters
- Ask each other how you do worship? Learn from each other
- Take time to review the process to your goals three or four times a year
- We're here to help the world and to spread the word about how great Unitarianism is

I would add to this list: attend MUA AGMs and training days and other events – they are a great opportunity to network and learn and share best practice.

Sue Woolley, Northampton

#### What inspires me?

I know that lots of people are inspired by heroic exploits, or by the great outdoors. I'm inspired by great speeches, by books, by the power of information and human knowledge. But mostly I'm inspired by music – sometimes the indie bands from my teenage years, other times weird contemporary classical compositions with no tune, or lately discovered (by me) country, folk and world music.

Music is a delight to my soul, and so slippery to describe. A great performance can make you feel connected to every other person listening. A beloved album is comforting and warm, like the haven of duvet on a cold winter's day. The right music can evoke the hazy, lazy days of summer, and the fresh chill of early autumn. Music makes you want to dance and sing and shout and laugh and run with joy.

Music is a great leveller – you don't need to be clever or artistic to enjoy the perfect song, and if I want to change my mood, or wallow in it, it's all possible with the shuffling of cds or a search through You Tube.

They say a picture paints a thousand words. For me, music paints thousands upon thousand of beautiful pictures. I'm with Nietzsche on this, 'without music, life would be a mistake'.

Angela Maher  
UNM, Birmingham

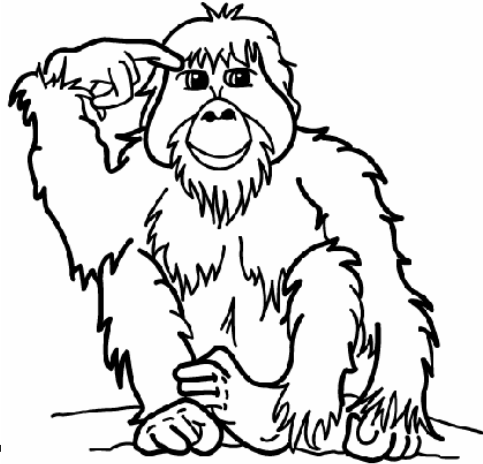


## Coffee break (Part 2)

One day the zoo-keeper noticed that the orangutan was reading two books - the Bible and Darwin's Origin of Species.

Surprised, he asked the ape, "Why are you reading both those books?"

"Well," said the orangutan, "I just wanted to know if I was my brother's keeper or my keeper's brother."



### Great truths that adults have learned ...

- 1) Raising teenagers is like nailing jelly to a tree.
- 2) Wrinkles don't hurt.
- 3) Families are like fudge - mostly sweet, with a few nuts.
- 4) Today's mighty oak is just yesterday's nut that held its ground.
- 5) Laughing is good exercise. It's like jogging on the inside.
- 6) Middle age is when you choose your cereal for the fibre, not the toy.

### Great truths about growing old ...

- 1) Growing old is mandatory; growing up is optional.
- 2) When you fall down, you wonder what else you can do while you are down there.
- 3) It's frustrating when you know all the answers, but nobody bothers to ask you the questions.
- 4) Time may be a great healer, but it's a lousy beautician.

From Warwick's newsletter...

## Poets' Corner

### Heartprints

*Author unknown.*

Whatever our hands touch---  
We leave fingerprints!  
On walls, on furniture,  
On doorknobs, dishes, books,  
As we touch we leave our identity.

Oh please where ever I go today,  
Help me leave heartprints!  
Heartprints of compassion  
Of understanding and love.  
Heartprints of kindness  
and genuine concern.

May my heart touch a lonely  
neighbour  
Or a runaway daughter,  
Or an anxious mother,  
Or, perhaps, a dear friend!

I shall go out today  
To leave heartprints,  
And if someone should say  
"I felt your touch,"  
May that one sense be...  
YOUR LOVE Touching through  
ME.



Image by DragonArt

## It's all about love ...

*These are (abridged) extracts from some of the newsletters...*

In the same month that I was reflecting how quickly 3 years of ministry here had passed, my Gran was 93. She sent me a letter thanking me for the card and plant which I sent to her. "I can't believe I'm 93!" she wrote. Isn't it interesting that we both reflecting how quickly it has gone, even though we were talking about vastly different amounts of time?

The changes my Gran has seen in her life have been immense. She has lived to see her children, children's children, and her children's children's children grow up! When faced with such longevity, 3 years of ministry seems like no time at all - like we've just got started. And yet, over the 3 years, we've become connected as Minister and congregation and we've achieved much together.

I think of two of my predecessors: the Rev William Field at Warwick and the Rev Thomas Gorton at Kingswood. They both completed well over 50 years of Ministry within their respective congregations and I wonder whether they said similar things? I wonder whether they were heard to say, "I can't believe how quickly it has gone..."?

We get one chance at life. The years fly by and seem to do so quickly. It's important, therefore, that we spend as much time as possible doing what we love and spending it with the people we love. I am blessed to say that I do just that in my ministry and I hope that by being associated with this chapel you can say the same.

Rev. Ant Howe, in Warwick's newsletter

Hooray!! On May 23<sup>rd</sup> I was extremely happy to officiate at a wedding ceremony at New Meeting. You may well wonder why this occasion provokes a response of jubilation within me and the short answer is this is the first wedding in the church since 1996.

Due to certain religious rules and regulations the Anglican priest had decided that he would not marry Tom and his fiancée Jane, who comes from China. Feeling a little dejected, Tom contacted me and we arranged a meeting, where I assured him that if it was legally permitted, I would be delighted to conduct the service.

Tom began to attend the church of his own free will and found within its walls a welcome and an approach to religion and spirituality that suited his own way of being and thinking and as such his

disappointment and frustration turned into happiness and joy. So it was a wonderful honour for me to conduct the service for Tom and Jane. A number of members of the congregation came to add numbers and I dare say volume to the singing, but also to support the couple on the beginning of their journey of marriage together.

One of the main things that I have preached about since arriving at UNM is the centrality of love in any spiritual endeavour. This is especially important when we look at building relationships in a religious community. The wedding between Tom and Jane was based upon a love that transcended geographical and cultural barriers. The open minded approach at the heart of our community allowed this union of love to take place and it is times such as these that make me incredibly proud to be part of New Meeting; a place where the decision to do what is right is not stifled by unnecessary rules and regulations. So let us in freedom continue to strive to know the secrets of both worlds in and through that great and central tenet of Love.

Rev. Simon Ramsay, in UNM Birmingham's newsletter

Our Cotswold Group has functioned well for many years now and its success as a group ministry is due in no small measure to the mutual support and understanding fostered between our distinctly different congregations. Our occasional meetings for joint worship and fellowship play an important part in developing this connection.

I do believe that the outlook is good provided we maintain a strong sense of community. Changes in membership over time can lead to people not knowing everyone as well as they might and it's possible that this can in turn lead to our community fragmenting into smaller groups.

For myself I wish to see each of our congregations develop in the spirit of a single community with everyone supporting everyone else, and where those who primarily draw upon the support of others can have the reassurance that they too, by receiving support, are contributing to the worth and value of the whole supportive and loving network that our communities are. Please help us to do this. If you see evidence of, or feel you might have inadvertently contributed to a tendency among our congregations to fragment in this way, do please endeavour to include everyone. Let's work to maintain that loving and mutually supportive community of which everyone can feel that they are a part.

Rev. Don Phillips, in Cotswold Group's newsletter

## Never a moment

*Penny Quest*

What is it within us which wells up when we need it most?  
That God-sense which is always there;  
That inspiration which appears out of nowhere;  
That faith in ourselves which takes us by surprise;  
That moment of understanding which enables us to call upon our reserves  
To try again.

We all have within us those fundamental resources of love and joy;  
A sense of humour which can turn the most dire happening  
Into reason for laughter;  
Inner strength which can be called upon  
When we come to the aid of others or when we need help ourselves;  
Inner wisdom which provides the answers to our unspoken questions.

There is never a moment when we are alone;  
Never a moment when our cries for help will not be answered;  
Never a moment when we are left unsupported;  
Never a moment when insight is not available to us;  
Never a moment when we are not connected to God, the Universe, the All-That-Is.

## God is not a being

*John Burroughs*

God is the fact of the fact, the life of the life, the soul of the soul,  
the incomprehensible, the sum of all contradictions,  
the unity of all diversity.

God cannot be seen, but by God all seeing comes;  
cannot be heard, but by God all hearing comes.

Turn your back upon God  
and you turn your back upon gravity, upon air, upon light.

God is not a being, yet apart from God there is no being—there is no  
apart from God.

*Quoted in Oxford's July/August newsletter*

## Memories

### Janice Ashley, 1932 - 2009

The Midland Unitarian Association is very sad to announce the death of a dear friend to many of us, Miss Janice Ashley. She died peacefully in her sleep following a battle with cancer on 20th July.



Janice was an active member of The Great Meeting House Unitarian Church, Coventry all her life, being Church Secretary and Lettings Secretary - posts she took over from her parents. She was also a Church Trustee.

In the 1960s and 1970s she was one of an active group of young Unitarians in the Midlands who organised annual activities and competitions for the Midland Sunday Schools Association.

Under the guidance of the late Philip Spencer (of West Bromwich) she studied to become a lay preacher, and led worship regularly around the District until the end of 2008. She was President of the Midland Union of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches from 1983 - 1985, and its Secretary from 1985 - 1987. She was also a leading member of the Birmingham District Women's League, being its President from 2007 until her death. She had also represented the District on Central Committee. She was able to attend the District AGM in March 2009. She was also involved with the Unitarian Lay Preachers Association (which later merged with the Unitarian Association of Lay Leaders), being its President from 1992 - 1993, and was its conference organiser for many years. She was also very much involved with Moose International, the local branch of which meets at The Great Meeting House in Coventry.

Janice was a personal friend and we spent many happy times visiting various areas for days out and short holidays. She will be greatly missed by her Congregation and many friends throughout

the Unitarian movement. Our sympathies are sent to her brother Anthony and sister-in-law Sheila, and to her cousin Jean Dyer.

Janice's funeral took place at Great Meeting House, Coventry on 4<sup>th</sup> August. The church was full of her friends, personal, and from church, Moose International and other associations etc with which she had connections.

Janice had written her own service, which was conducted by Rev. Penny Johnson, a friend and retired minister, who spoke tenderly of Janice, reflecting on personal connections and friendship. Hymns consisted of '*A fire-mist and a planet*', '*Hushed was the evening hymn*' and '*A church is a living fellowship*'. Readings were 'Who' by the late Rev. Maurice Bonner from his collection 'The Beckoning Gleam', read by Ann Hughes; and 'Love' by Iris Hesselden read by Kathleen Warden from Moose International Ladies Circle. Barbara Russell gave a Personal Reflection. The Moose Ladies provided refreshments at the end of the service.

Ann Hughes

The Unitarian Faith lost a fine Lay Speaker, the Moose Fraternal a loyal member, and we lost a good friend when Janice Ashley died in the early morning of 20th July 2009.

As a Lay Speaker she was the 'backbone' of our services at Dudley Old Meeting House and All Souls' Wolverhampton, always ready to step in if someone could not come. "Can't do a sermon" she would say "But I'll find some good readings". These would be spiced with an anecdote, for Janice had a fine sense of humour which she kept to the end.

Others will speak of the contributions Janice made to many organisations – the Birmingham District Women's League will mourn her not only as a long-time colleague but as President, but it is as a friend that Ken and I will miss her.

She was a good companion in our holidays at Mooseheart, and I always looked forward to our 'phone conversations and exchange of news – and a bit of gossip! Janice has left a gap in our lives.

Good night and God bless, Dear Friend.

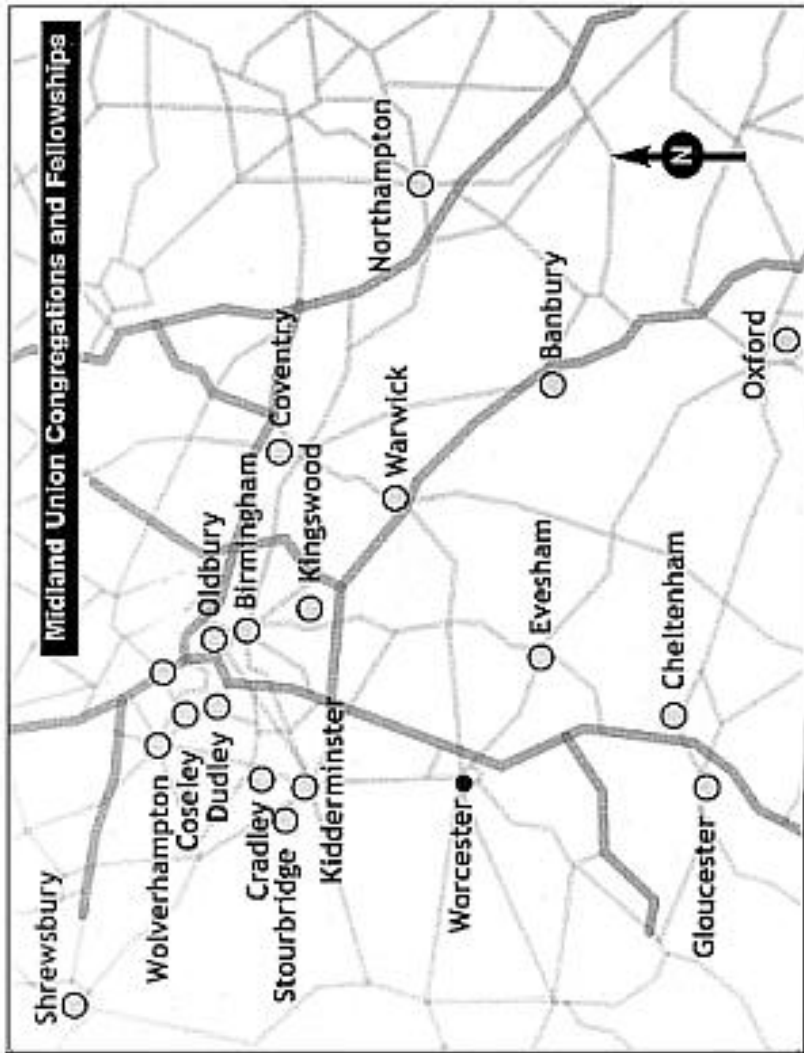
Ken and Barbara Russell

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The Midland Unitarian Association website can be found at  
[www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk](http://www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk)



“When someone is full of love and compassion,  
 he cannot draw a line between two countries,  
 two faiths, or two religions.”

*(Amma)*

Now you've reached the end of this issue, tell us what you think of it!  
 Please write or email us with your ideas, letters and comments.

Contact details are inside the front page.

The WINTER 2009 Issue will be published in December.

Please can we have your contributions on the theme of  
**'New Beginnings'**

by **31<sup>st</sup> October 2009** for inclusion in this issue.

The theme for **SPRING 2010** will be **'Topics for services'**

We welcome contributions from **all** our readers.