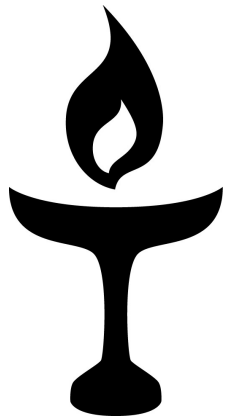


MU NOW



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THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN
ASSOCIATION

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AIMS OF THE MUA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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

From the Editor

Welcome to the May 2025 issue of *MU Now*. I especially thank MUA President for David Taylor, for reporting on the MUA AGM and sharing his inspirational address delivered on that occasion, so that it is available for a wider audience.

And I am also grateful to Dorothy Haughton of Shrewsbury for contributing two thought-provoking articles, and to Rev Peter Godfrey for his article on the theme.

Submissions to *MU Now*

We are particularly looking for stories on local activities, or with a local interest, in addition to articles on the theme.

The theme for the next issue, due out in September 2025, is, "Sustainability". You may interpret that any way you like: environmentally, or congregationally!

The deadline for submissions is Friday 5th September 2025.

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

THANK YOU!

Sue Woolley

President's Piece



The theme of this issue of *MU Now* is 'Living our Faith'. How do we put our faith into practical use? How do we become people of deeds and not just words?

What is faith? Do we, as Unitarians, have a definition of faith we would all be happy with? The novelist W. Somerset Maugham once wrote, "A Unitarian very earnestly disbelieves in almost everything that anybody else believes, and he has a very lively sustaining faith in he doesn't quite know what." A little harsh perhaps, but maybe closer to the truth than many of us would admit!

In James 2:14-17 we read, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

By one of those happy coincidences that seem to happen a lot to me, I have recently been rereading *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. He echoes the words from James when he says, "You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you."

To me this is the essence of my faith. It is all too easy to wear our faith almost as a badge of honour, but it is far more difficult to express the essence of that faith. For me, my faith is not bound up in going to church, leading a service (although these are important). It is being of some small value or assistance to someone in need. Only recently, one Sunday evening, just as I was getting ready for bed, my elderly neighbour rang with a problem. Her fuse switch had tripped, leaving her without any lights. If I am being honest, I was tired, and really not in the mood to get dressed again, but my philosophy is always, "But there for the Grace of God go I". Acts of kindness and support are what define us regardless of any faith we may profess. How many times have you asked someone how they are, only for them to give you chapter and verse of their recent endeavours and not ask you how you are in return? A simple "How are you?" can say plenty about us, and faith may play a role here.

As people of faith we acknowledge that we are part of something greater, that there is a holistic connection between us and all living things. As the poet John Donne says in his famous poem, *"Each man's death diminishes me, For I am involved in mankind"*.

But let's leave the final word to that Unitarian favourite, Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The purpose of life is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well."

David Taylor

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## **District Minister: May Update**

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

**Leading worship around the Midland Unitarian Association:**  
Since March 2020, I have been producing an online service for the District each week, which has been posted around by e-mail and also on the MUA website and am continuing to do so. It is always a joy to lead worship in person, to see all your faces and catch up with your news. I apologise for missing the end of March and most of April, on account of having shingles. And I'm most grateful to our President, David Taylor, and to Aleks Zgliniska, for stepping in and running the AGM in my absence. There are full reports of the AGM elsewhere in this issue.

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

**And if you are feeling alone and would like to hear another human voice, please feel free to give me a call on 01604 870746 or 0785 325 3880...**

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

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In a Nutshell: Presidential Address at the MUA AGM by David Taylor

Chalice Lighting

As we light our chalice
We think about what this light means
It represents the light within ourselves
And the light within others
Threads of the universal light of love

As we have heard today, and will hear more later on from Rev Mark Hutchinson, the MUA Sustainability Reports have been published. This is something of a 'Domesday Book' moment for our region; a detailed report of MUA congregations, where they are now, and where they could be in the future. This is something that has been long overdue, and we are extremely grateful to Winnie, Mark, Sue, Aleks and Emma for all their hard work. I know many of us have concerns about our own and other congregations within the MUA. Our congregations have been suffering for some time now. We have lost not only valued congregations such as Dudley, Kidderminster and Coseley, but much valued members of existing congregations. Those that are left I know, have been feeling the stress and the strain, post Covid, of keeping the doors open whilst repeating over and over the phrase: "all shall be well".

These words from the medieval mystic Julian of Norwich have been running through my head recently, like a mantra. Some moments, I actually feel and believe them, but mostly I find myself repeating them over and over, willing them to be true.

I hope that as we come together in this space at Evesham today, it can be a little respite of solitude, a place of nurture, and a place where we can be reminded of God's assurance and presence and care, that we are not alone.

And yet, we can't with certainty say "all will be well" and then just put our heads in the sand and pretend that if we just hide long enough everything will magically change. Because we know there are so many things in our congregations that are not well. There are things in each of our lives that are not well. And as long as all is not well in us and around us, how can we turn a blind eye to the things that need to change? We know we need to keep showing up and being part of the work in our congregations, and

yet, we come together and we admit and confess in this sanctuary together, that at times we lose heart and need inspiration.

Recently, I have found myself turning again and again to a small paperback book on my shelves at home. Out of the plethora of books, this little book keeps calling to me. It's my 1982 copy of 'Revelations of Divine Love' by Julian of Norwich, the first book in English which is known to have been authored by a woman.

At this point in the address, hazelnuts were handed out, one for each person.



(image: Wikimedia Commons)

In the time that Julian lived, centuries of European stability were ending, the Hundred Years War began, the Peasants Revolt happened, political instability rose, there were religious upheavals, and the Black Death occurred.

In the midst of this, she lived as a nun in a Benedictine community, and took her name from St Julian's church in Norwich. At some point between 1390 and her death in 1416, she became an anchoress. She literally lived in one room for the rest

of her life and was not allowed to leave. She spent her days in silent prayer and reflection.

It is likely that she was even buried under the floor of her cell. This was so stark that before entering she would have attended her own funeral. When she went in, the door was locked and sealed with wax seals and her only contact was through a small window where she could receive food and Communion. She would be visited by those seeking spiritual advice. Her most famous visitor was the fellow medieval mystic, Margery Kempe, who wished to gain Julian's advice on her own visions of the divine. Today the site of her cell has a deep stillness and peace about it – a place to sit and reflect.

On 8th May 1373, when she was in her 30s, Julian came close to death and had a series of 16 visions, or 'showings' as she called them, after which she recovered. After her visions, Julian focused in her writings on spirituality and creation, stressing that everything has its being through the love of God, and that we are made for eternity.

In one of the best known of her visions, Julian sees a hazelnut in the palm of her hand, which is why I have given one of these to each of you. Julian discovered during many decades in that room that a hazelnut could tell her everything about God's love for creation.

She saw that the world is fragile and vulnerable. It is tiny in comparison to the vastness of space and eternity, even more so for us than for Julian. But ultimately it is loved and that love is the source of our deepest hope in God and each other. It is held, it is cared for by the maker, redeemer and sustainer of all things.

She wrote:

"He showed me a little thing the size of a hazelnut, in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with my mind's eye and I thought, 'What can this be?'

And the answer came, 'It is all that is made'. I marvelled that it could last, for I thought it might have crumbled to nothing, it was so small.

And the answer came into my mind: 'It lasts and ever shall because God loves it'. And all things have being through the love of God".

In light of this, consider the words of the American astronaut James Irwin, a modern man orbiting the Earth, and compare them to the words of Julian, a medieval woman who never left her cell. They use practically the same words: "As we got further and further away, the Earth diminished in size. Finally, it shrank to the size of a marble, the most beautiful you can imagine. That beautiful, warm, living object looked so fragile, so delicate, that if you touched it with a finger it would crumble and fall apart. Seeing this has to change a person."

Some people, as they lie on their deathbeds, see their lives pass before them in a flash. Julian sees all creation enclosed in the symbol of a little hazelnut, as miniscule in God's eye as a tiny round ball floating in space.

Nevertheless, the smallness does not mean the hazelnut is any less loved by God for being so little and so ordinary. It is loved equally with suns and moons and stars, all the wonders of nature, and the uniqueness of human beings. In the course of future Revelations, Julian will experience again and again this ever-present, all-pervasive reality of love that alone sustains creation. Rather, creation is nothing else but the expression of Divine Love.

That ability to perceive all truth through one tiny, created thing is a legacy picked up by poets that followed Julian. The poet William Blake says, 'To see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wild flower: Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, And eternity in an hour.' Blake is making the same point – that through something tiny you can see everything.

And that is how I look at our congregations, like little hazelnuts. As small and seemingly fragile as some of us may feel, they are a microcosm of the world.

But they are also tough and resilient. They all have the potential to grow. And they have that potential because they are all loved. And it is through this love that we support each other. For the 350th anniversary of my own congregation at Stourbridge, it was heartening to see congregations from Evesham, Kidderminster, Kingswood and Dudley join us for our celebrations. Likewise, in our own small way, my wife Carolyn and I always try and support the Summer and Winter fayres at Kingswood (as I know Gavin from Oxford does too). And earlier this year, members of congregations from Shrewsbury and my own Stourbridge answered a call for support from Birmingham New Meeting to attend their Sunday service with members of the GA's Executive Committee. As I have discovered at Stourbridge, being small does not make you weak. And as the Dalai Lama said, "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito."

As a member of the MUA committee, I have had the benefit of seeing all the Sustainability Reports. And big or small, in essence, we all share the same concerns. We are all worried about falling congregational numbers and the best way to care for and utilise our places of worship. And this is nothing new. Back in 2006 the Lindsey Press published a book, *Being Together*, and the debate

back then centred around the same concerns. But I will leave Mark to tell us more about the Sustainability Reports.

Julian of Norwich went on in her vision of the hazelnut to talk about how we need to strive to have oneness with God. We will never have complete rest or happiness outside of this. Or to use the language of John's gospel, we are to abide in that love. This is where we are to dwell and know we dwell, where we have our home.

As we look at the hazelnut, resting in the palm of our hand, Julian teaches us that we find the love of God visible for us. Just as the hazelnut is small, it has great potential to grow as a seed into a giant tree. We are looking at eternity in the palm of our hand, to the love of eternity and at the eternal love of the creator. Julian's vision teaches us that this is a God who wants to sit in the palm of our hand. This is a God who calls forth our care.

Julian also cautions us about how we experience this love. She said: "God did not say, 'You shall not be tormented, you shall not be troubled, you shall not be grieved', No, but He did say, 'You shall not be overcome.'"

As I mentioned at the start, the most well-known phrase associated with Julian is, "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well". It is a phrase that many people turned to during the Covid pandemic. And it is now reproduced on cards and gifts.

But things quite obviously are not always well. You only have to look at the world around us to see that. But even when all appears lost, there is always hope and love.

You may remember that last year, between 30th July and 7th August, an estimated 29 anti-immigration demonstrations and riots took place across 27 towns and cities in the UK.

At of a mini market in Southport, windows were smashed and looting had meant that its owner, Chanaka, who came to the UK from Sri Lanka, thought it was the end of his business. Yet, the next morning, he found people at work there clearing away the broken glass and carrying out repairs; a local builder replaced his windows without charge and one of his suppliers brought a cabinet of ice cream. A local beauty salon crowdfunded an appeal which raised £11,000 for costs and, a few days later, his shop reopened. As Chanaka said, "It's not about the money people gave me. It was the messages, the cards, the flowers. That support from strangers is unbelievable."

The response was heartwarming, as strangers got to know each other, respond to needs and support one another, rebuilding community where it had been devastated. Rather than just grumbling about what was happening, people rallied round and activated a response which would overcome the negativity and hostility that had been generated as people refused to contribute further to the devastation and pain that had been caused. I am also reminded of the words of Jesus in Johns Gospel (Ch.15 Vs: 17) "This is my command: Love each other."

Back in 2010, which seems like a life time ago now, I had a book on local history published by Amberley Books. One Saturday morning, as part of the publicity, the local evening newspaper asked me to do a photoshoot at a pub about 12 miles away. And even though it was snowing, I agreed. By the time we had finished, it had snowed even more, making the journey home very difficult and stressful, I was nearly home when I got stuck. It wasn't just me. Other cars had become snow bound and stuck,

slipping and sliding in the deep snow as we all tried to make it up the hill. The poet John Donne said that "No man is an island", so I got out of my car and began to dig out the car next to me, helping to push it onward on its journey. Then the same to the car in front of me. And then someone who had until then, been sat in their own car, in their own little island, began to help me. And rather than being little islands marooned in the snow, one by one we became united in helping each other. We were no longer islands, we were part of the whole. As Donne put it in his famous poem:

"No man is an island, Entire of itself;
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less,
As well as if a promontory were:
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
Or of thine own were.
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee."

The message I take from Julian and the hazelnut is that no matter how hard it gets, no matter how tired we are, God is with us. No matter how many things need to change in our congregations and in the world around us, no matter how dark it looks, God is with us. This expansive force of Love is always drawing us individually and collectively towards the good. God is always making good on His promise that, right here in this very moment "all (really will) be well."

Benediction:

Let nothing disturb you
 Let nothing frighten you
 All shall be well
 Only Love remains
 Patience obtains all things
 Whoever has Love lacks nothing
 Love alone is enough
 May the love of God surround us,
 May the peace of God assure us,
 And may the blessing of God rest with us
 Until we gather again.
Amen

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### **Report of MUA AGM by David Taylor**

On Saturday 22nd March, 21 members of various MUA congregations met at the AGM, hosted this year by Evesham. Those arriving early were able to catch up with old friends and examine the impressive building work undertaken in the chapel gatehouse and school room.

The AGM was held in the upstairs gatehouse room, recently refurbished making this an excellent room for any meeting. Unfortunately this year Rev. Sue Woolley was unable to attend as she had shingles, but we did our best to carry on without Sue's steady hand on the tiller.

Opening devotions were led by Rev. Jeffrey Bowes, minister at Coventry. With business swiftly dealt with, it was time for the AGM of the Lay Service Leaders.

Lunchtime gave us all ample opportunity to relax, chat and explore the centre of Evesham. After lunch, fortified by food, conversation and a chance to unwind, the MUA Presidential Address was given by David Taylor in the chapel. His theme was Julian of Norwich, her vision of the hazelnut and local congregations.

After a short refreshment break, we retired to the gatehouse for the afternoon lecture, given this year by Rev. Mark Hutchinson. Suitably enough, his theme was the recent Sustainability Reports. Audience participation was the order of the afternoon, giving us plenty of opportunity to share ideas and ask questions.

By 4pm it was time to depart for home. Yet another successful MUA AGM was over.

A special mention of thanks must go to everyone from Evesham for making us all feel very welcome, especially Jane Couper who kept refreshments flowing, and Humphrey Bright for providing his skill on the organ.



David Taylor, Aleks Zglinska, Kieren Mardle-Moss and Ann Matthews during the AGM (photo: Carolyn Taylor)

Below: round table discussions about the Sustainability Reports (photo Carolyn Taylor)



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More Ideas from Dorothy Haughton

I have just been reading my latest copy of *Progressive Voices*, the magazine of the Progressive Christianity Network Magazine.

Brief Digression. I first went to a PCN meeting to hear the late and much lamented Bishop John Shelby Spong. I liked the people I met there and went to a couple of conferences. What surprised me was a) that I was the only Unitarian there and, in some cases, the only Unitarian they had ever met. I do not and have never considered myself a Christian but when I gave the simple definition of Unitarianism: Jesus was a man, there were no miracles, you have to knit your own faith, they all said without hesitation, 'Just like us.'

In the magazine there was a lovely article by an older person who had just attended his first Greenbelt Festival. "As someone who has largely given up on traditional church, the Greenbelt experience gave me so much hope for the future of intelligent, inclusive and compassionate Christianity. It spoke of the real Jesus of the Gospels whilst largely jettisoning the Jesus of our religious institutions. It spoke of God's unconditional love rather than condemnation. It reminded me of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's 'Rainbow People of God' and it was a living 21st century expression of words recorded by the early Church father, Tertullian – 'See how they (these Christians) love one another!' If only the spirit of Greenbelt could infuse all our churches."

Now, I do not like festivals. I hate camping. I find there are too many people and whatever I attempt to go to has just finished. It was fine when I was in a group but on my own, No thank you. So I am going to ask you to do something that I will not do. And I have said it before. But I am saying it again. I think the Greenbelt Festival is somewhere where we might have a presence.

[Please Note: The Greenbelt Takeaway is the exhibitors village for charities and other organisations to promote their work to festivalgoers. The reference to a "Takeaway" reflects the organisers' belief that the festival isn't just for August Bank Holiday weekend, but can make a difference for life.]

Do you think it is possible that there may be somewhere in the Unitarian movement a group of people who enjoy festivals, own a tent and would happily set up a Unitarian stall at the next Greenbelt Festival? There is no point whining on and on about how we are declining. If we don't make a bit of a push to get ourselves 'out there' then we only have ourselves to blame. Also, and I am not the only person to say this. Are you sure that what you are offering is good enough? I remember many, many years

ago the then GA President, Neville Kenyon, inveighing against the dreadful state of many Unitarian places of worship – full of dead curtains and dead hymn books. Are we sure that our place of worship isn't full of dead ideas and dead minds? We claim to welcome anyone but do we only welcome people who are 'like us'?

There is a lovely Unitarian joke. A newcomer arrives and is warmly welcomed. During the service she cries out. 'Hallelujah' and 'Praise the Lord'. At the end of the service she is politely told that 'we do not worship like that here' so she, of course, goes away and never comes back. If we genuinely were the open minded people we claim to be then surely the correct response would be, 'Let's try this at the next service.' I may have said before that I love the circle services that we hold at Shrewsbury where people are encouraged to contribute and I have, at times, been able to persuade people to call out and 'interrupt' me.

I read somewhere that at one time in the Anglican church before the Protestant groups had broken away it was common for people to begin a discussion at the end of the address. I also may have mentioned a visit to a church with a German friend where the sermon was delivered with everyone sitting in a circle and everyone commenting on it at the end.

Just because we have always done it “like this” doesn't mean we have to go on doing it like this. Go on. I challenge you. Hold a service at which everyone is encouraged to call out, question, add ideas, etc. However, you must have the 'Shut up, Dotty' rule. My friends, who know how much I love the sound of my own voice and my need to comment on everything, developed the simple solution of saying, 'Shut up, Dotty' when I got carried away. It doesn't have to be quite as rude as that. Just a simple comment that everyone needs to be able to contribute and if someone seems

to be going on for too long then a finger will be raised and they have 30 seconds to finish.

At Upper Pocklington we never listen to what anyone else is saying as they are bound to be wrong so we just happily talk to ourselves. Dorothy's mother always used to say, when discovered talking to herself, 'Always talk to the most intelligent person present.' Which is , of course, what we do.

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## Rituals by Dorothy Haughton

Interesting isn't it, how many churches have adopted the chalice lighting ritual to start the service. I was at my old church when it was done for the first time and a friend walked out after the service saying, “Papist, it's purely papist.” Of course, at one time no one would have thought of having a candle anywhere near a Unitarian church, chapel or meeting room. [Now, of course the flaming chalice is the symbol of our faith. Ed.]



We are equally against communion. I found once a set for simultaneous communion which is, I think, a Methodist idea. Everyone has a small cup of Ribena and a piece of bread and they eat and drink together. Matthew introduces the 'This is my body' and it is repeated in Corinthians (Not my superior Biblical knowledge – Google!). I may have read somewhere that it was popular to hold agape meals as a memorial of the Last Supper but, perhaps, when the congregations became too large it was necessary to have a form of symbolic representation. Matthew may also have been linking this with the Passover meal.



(image: PxHere)

It might be nice if we had a communion remembering the old Chinese chopsticks story which is, in fact a Jewish Spoon story.

An angel comes to take a good man to heaven. He asks if he might first visit Hell and the angel agrees. They arrive in a place sumptuously furnished and with a table spread with the most delicious foods and wines. But everyone is screaming at each other in rage. The angel points out that they each have a spoon attached to their elbow so that they cannot eat. 'This is indeed Hell,' says the man. The angel takes him to another room sumptuously furnished and with a table spread with the most

delicious foods and wines. Here everyone is laughing and eating and having a wonderful time. 'No spoons,' said the man. 'Oh yes,' said the angel, 'Look! But here they have learned to feed each other.'

Do you think we might respond more positively to communion services if we took bread, 'broke' it and handed half the piece to someone else? If we took a glass of wine or Ribena and handed it to someone else? Lots of congregations have shared lunches but though these are jolly they lack the symbolic grace. Think about it.

It may, of course, be a ritual too far for many people.

## ~~~~~ Living Our Faith

### Living Our Faith

My first thought on reading the subject for this issue of *MU Now* was who/what is meant by 'our'? Do 'we' all have the same faith?

I think the answer is that 'our' means Unitarians, in this instance those of us in the Midlands who read this journal. 'Our' faith is Unitarian. So the subject is '**How** are we living our faith?'

The answer will not be the same because we are all different. We have different personalities, different occupations, interests and means. Nevertheless there will be a basic endeavour to support our faith in Unitarianism. To support as much as we can our fellow Unitarians, our churches, chapels, meeting houses and fellowships, and supporting our ministers and leaders.

We support these people and communities because they are supporting us in our faith, our beliefs. Because we are Unitarians this faith, these beliefs will not be precisely the same. But in my experience they will be supporting and encouraging such things as the freedom and right for each of us to think for ourselves, a belief in the essential goodness of people to which goodness we should all appeal in our ways of trying to live happily together – making the ‘beloved community’ in our various communities.

Last week, after the local elections I read one commentator referring to some things that had been said during the campaign - ‘Where’s the kindness?’

I think that living one’s Unitarian faith means believing in the power of love and kindness and trying to use this power. In doing this – because we are Unitarian – we can be encouraged by people of other faiths as well as by Unitarian colleagues. When I write this I am thinking especially of the late Pope Francis’s words ‘Build bridges not walls’.

I am writing on the anniversary of VE day. How deeply saddening it is that there are still terrible wars going on. ‘When will they ever learn?’ the song goes. Well we have learnt that wars are terrible but we haven’t learnt how to put our knowledge into practice.

Living our faith means, in spite of what we see all around us, not giving up. As Paul wrote in his impassioned letter to the people in the little church in Galatia - ‘Let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.’ [Gal. 6.v9 New International Version]

**Rev Peter Godfrey (Stroud)**

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A Love of Mystery

The Unitarian and Transcendentalist writer, Ralph Waldo Emerson, once wrote, “I prefer to live in a world surrounded by mysteries, rather than in one so small, that my mind can comprehend it.”

And one of my best-loved non-fiction authors, Brené Brown, wrote in my favourite book of hers, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, that she initially believed that "faith meant 'there's a reason for everything'" Then she discovered that "faith meant something else to [the men and women living the Wholehearted journey]." Which led her to redefine faith, based on the responses she was hearing from them, "Faith is a place of mystery, where we find the courage to believe in what we cannot see and the strength to let go of our fear of uncertainty."

I believe that our lives are richer if we can find that courage, and love the mystery, the sacred not-knowing of life. Theologian Frederick Buechner wrote, "Faith is better understood as a verb rather than as a noun, as a process rather than a possession. It is on-again-off-again, rather than once-and-for-all. Faith is about not being sure where you're going, but going anyway. And theologian Paul Tillich wrote, "Doubt isn't the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith."

Unitarians have a great capacity for mystery, for "living in the questions", as Rainer Maria Rilke put it. For example, we can never prove that God exists (or doesn't exist). But we can have faith that He (or She or It) does. And live our lives as though we believed it. Which I think is what Emerson meant when he said he preferred to "live in a world surrounded by mysteries."



Unitarian faith often includes a healthy dollop of doubt - not taking anything for granted, not accepting anything without questioning it first. We have always been in the habit of questioning beliefs and cherishing doubts. I would guess that many of us came to Unitarianism precisely by that path - by starting to question some of the beliefs we grew up with. In my case, I realised that I could not accept the divinity of Jesus as the unique Son of God, and also struggled with the idea that his death on the cross somehow put me back into right relationship with God. But to quote Jan Carlsson-Bull, Unitarians have learned to "hold faith and doubt in reverent balance".

Which means actively searching for and working out what gives your life meaning, putting your whole heart and mind and soul into it, and yet *at the same time*, totally respecting the right of every other member of your Unitarian community to disagree with you. It can be a tough call, sometimes.

Holding faith and doubt in reverent balance, living and loving in mystery, also means being open to new ideas, from wherever they come. Unitarianism at its best is a wonderfully open way of approaching life and religion, based on an appeal to reason, conscience and our own lived experience. It is an ongoing process - you don't just experience a one-off conversion and then rest on those fixed beliefs for the rest of your life; every Unitarian has a duty to approach all new ideas and concepts reverently and critically, and take from them what speaks to our own reason and conscience, and what makes sense in the context of our own lived experience, in order to live out our lives in the best and truest way we can, making room for mystery, for uncertainty, along the way.

Sue Woolley (MUA)

MUA Congregations: Times of Services

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

Every Sunday:

Birmingham	Unitarian New Meeting Church	11 am
Cheltenham & Gloucester	Bayshill Unitarian Church	11 am
Evesham	Oat Street Chapel	11 am ¹
Kingswood	Meeting House	11 am
Shrewsbury	Unitarian Church	11 am
Warwick	High Street Chapel	4.30 pm

First Sunday of the Month:

Northampton	Unitarian Meeting House	11 am
Stroud Fellowship	The Exchange, Stroud	3 pm

Second Sunday of the Month:

Coventry	Gt Meeting House Unitarian Church	11 am
Cradley	Park Lane Unitarian Chapel	6.30 pm ²
Stourbridge	Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel	11 am ³

Third Sunday of the Month:

Northampton	Unitarian Meeting House	11 am
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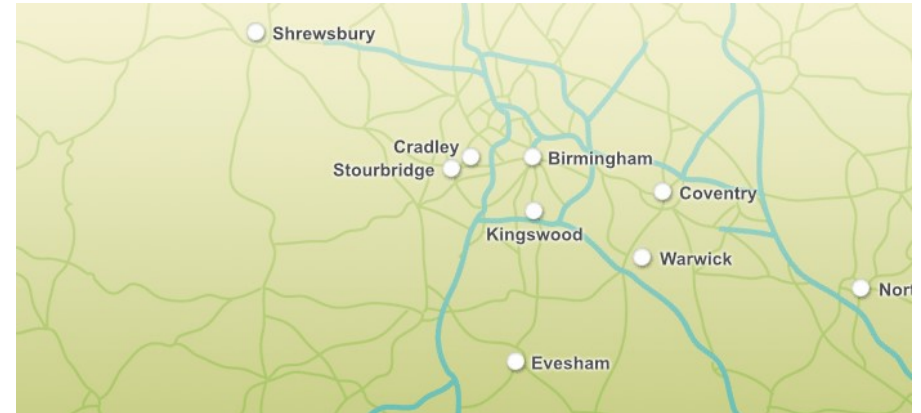
Fourth Sunday of the Month:

Coventry	Gt Meeting House Unitarian Church	11 am
Stourbridge	Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel	11 am ³

¹ No service on 5th Sundays ²currently in abeyance ³from March

MUA Congregations: Contact Details

Name	Contact	Details
Birmingham		0121 455 8818 info@birminghamnewmeeting.org.uk
Cheltenham & Gloucester	Sandy Man	ManS.CheltUnitarians@gmail.com
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Cradley	Sheila Powell	perconicous24@yahoo.co.uk 01384 480784
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**Please may we have your contributions on local matters,
and on the theme of “Sustainability”.**

by Friday 5th September 2025

Thank you!