

BITS AND PIECES . . . AND PLEASE KEEP THEM COMING IN!

Here is your 144th Midland Unitarian Association Bits & Pieces for July 2020. If you want any news from your congregation included here, please send it to me (details below)

RE-OPENING OUR PLACES OF WORSHIP

I am sure you have all heard the news that churches and chapels may re-open for worship, observing safe social-distancing measures, from 4th July. I have sent round two documents, one from the General Assembly and one from the LDPA Council, which detail the many factors which congregational committees will need to take into account before they make the decision to re-open. Please let me know when and if your church or chapel is planning to re-open, so that I can share it with other congregations in the District.

ONLINE SERVICES

As your District Minister, I am trying to do my bit by circulating an online service each Sunday via e-mail, and then delivering it in my own home at 11.00 am each week. My husband and I record it on the Thursday before, and the result is posted on the MUA website <https://www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk/> So you have a choice of reading the text, listening to the service, or both!

I am sending it out via e-mail each Tuesday, to give congregational secretaries time to post it on to those members of their congregations who are not on e-mail, as postal deliveries have become so much slower.

I will be on annual leave from Monday 29th June – Sunday 5th July, but will be posting the text of a service from Rev Anna Jarvis online to cover that Sunday.

If you know of anyone who is self-isolating, who may appreciate a phone call, please get in touch with me, either by e-mail, or by phone.

OTHER ONLINE ACTIVITIES ROUND THE DISTRICT

Online Gatherings with Rev Mark Hutchinson:

Heart and Soul gatherings, Saturdays 11.00 am, Sundays 6.00 pm

Touching the Spirit, Tuesdays and Thursdays 11.00 am

e-mail reverendhutch@gmail.com for Zoom details.

Birmingham UNM services with Rev Winnie Gordon: Sundays 11.00 – 11.40, followed by coffee and chat.

e-mail revgordon.unitarian@yahoo.com by Thursday of preceding week for Zoom details.

Bayshill Unitarians (Cheltenham) are doing their weekly service via Zoom.

Kingswood services with Rev Ant Howe:

posted on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYsw1tuoOiaTxV-T1r-xwVQ>

Shrewsbury Unitarians Coffee and Chat: Sundays 11.00 am

e-mail shrewsburyunitarians@gmail.com for Zoom details.

District Minister's weekly blogpost: usually posted on a Friday. <http://sue-still-i-am-one.blogspot.com/>

If you have any contributions for the next *Bits & Pieces*, please send them to me at 5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN or via e-mail to revsuewoolley@gmail.com Thanks!

PTO for a reflection from Malcolm Burns of Warwick Unitarians.

“The coronavirus epidemic has come along to remind us of our impermanence; it teaches us about the transitory nature of human lives. We hope that we all survive this particular threat, but we must all recognise that all will die in the end. The very fragility of life is emphasised these days by the daily count of victims and we all feel its transitoriness, reinforced whether by personal experience or from what we glean from the media.

The Chapel has heard our questions being considered for centuries – or is it fairer to say that the congregation of Nonconformists, whether they called themselves Dissenters, Presbyterians or Unitarians have met here to ask these questions for generations, and the Chapel has witnessed their debates and nurtured them in their doubts, supported them through their fears and upheld them in their convictions.

The Chapel is not unchanging: Malcolm Sadler saw to it that it was brought healthily into the twentieth century before it could collapse into decay. In the life of Warwick Unitarian Chapel there is change and continuity, impermanence and permanence.

Does the Coronavirus epidemic, as it keeps us away from the Chapel, provide us now with the opportunity think afresh about the nature of our faith and the rationale behind our allegiance to the denomination? We have to reflect now on what we want from our meetings, why we attend, what we contribute, how we want to reshape things to fit in with the “new normality” that is facing us as panic subsides but the reality of the ongoing existence of the Covid19 virus in our society becomes clear.

We ask ourselves whether the online services provided by Sue Woolley for the whole family of the Midland Unitarians or by Ant Howe on YouTube for his Kingswood congregation satisfy our needs, whether they provide for all our spiritual needs. Or do we ask ourselves what more we are looking for as we walk in through the front door of the Chapel on a Friday or a Sunday afternoon? And should we ask what it is that we have found here as we leave again ninety minutes later. Spiritual togetherness? Religious guidance from the speaker? Encouragement in our individual search for a ‘truth’? Support to reach each one’s own conclusions?

Or do we have other needs, whether deeper or just different needs, such as the warmth of personal contact, a sense of community bonding us by love in a way that online life cannot satisfy? Are we a social body as much as a religious and spiritual one? “We need to be together to feel less alone in our contemplation of life’s ultimate questions”, as Feargus O’Connor put it.

This may be a moment when we should be thinking of what we wish to be in the future, not just for ourselves but for a wider community, for the people of Warwick and the wider area. And we might consider whether we want to continue a practice of receiving stimulating thought and guidance from others or whether we should be exploring our own beliefs and doubts in a search for our own answers. It may be that Fridays provide us with the latter opportunity and Sundays the former. But now may be the chance to think that through a bit more, both individually and collectively. We will all doubtless have different answers to these questions which some may have been asking themselves regularly for years while others of us have slipped mutely into a pattern of behaviour that has been comfortable and undemanding.

When the familiar and well-worn pattern of our lives suddenly has to change, when we no longer see those we love, those who have walked along with us and helped to make our lives richer simply by being with us, it is frightening and upsetting.

But that is when the Chapel, calm and patient, is there for us.”

Malcolm Burns, from *Warwick Unitarians Newsletter*, June 2020