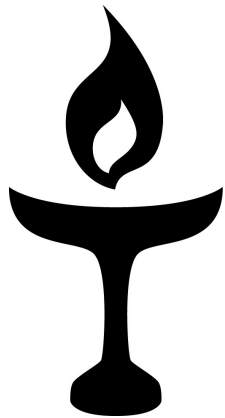


MU NOW



THE MAGAZINE OF
THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN
ASSOCIATION

ISSUE 60

AUTUMN 2020

www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk

In this issue:

| | |
|---|----|
| From the Editor | 4 |
| President's Piece | 5 |
| MUA District Minister Autumn Update | 6 |
| MUA Executive Committee Key Messages | 7 |
| <i>Role of the GA's Vice President</i> by Anne Mills | 8 |
| <i>Sheila Godfrey, 1930 – 2020</i> by Sarah Benfield | 15 |
| <i>Reflection on Prayer to God</i> by Ant Howe | 17 |
| <i>The Work of the Medaille Trust</i> by Joanne Brown | 20 |
| <i>Just for Today</i> by anonymous | 21 |
| <i>Special Poem for Older Folk</i> by anonymous | 22 |
| District Round-up | 23 |
| Spirit | 26 |
| MUA Congregations: Contact Details | 30 |

From the Editor

Welcome to the Autumn 2020 issue of *MU Now*.

This slim issue contains some inspirational and fascinating pieces by GA Vice-President Anne Mills, Rev Ant Howe and Joanne Brown, among others, and several contributions on the theme of *Spirit*.

If you want more to read, please send your articles in!

My thanks to everyone who contributed.

Submissions to *MU Now*

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

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

THANK YOU!

The theme for the next issue is “Looking Forward to a Better Year” and the deadline for submissions will be Friday 8th January 2021.

Sue Woolley

President's Piece



Hello friends, I am the 'new kid on the block' and so for those who don't know me, here is a little bit about me.

I was born in Portsmouth... yes, my dad was a sailor... but I spent my teenage years in the Lancashire/North Yorkshire border. After school I went to Brunel & Leeds Universities and eventually ended up doing teacher training... at the same time as my mum, who was a mature student. I taught in state and private schools for 30+ years and took early retirement after moving to Shropshire. I live near Shrewsbury and in 2014, whilst wandering around the town centre on a Saturday morning, I came across the Unitarian Church in the High Street. It was open for a second-hand book sale so, as I like looking around historic buildings, I came in and had a look around. I chatted to people, picked up some pamphlets, decided to turn up to the service the following day and voila... 'the rest is history' as they say!

Like some of you, I did not move fast enough and found myself on the church committee, then the chairperson, representative to the MUA and now I've slipped into the Presidency role. I'll leave world domination for another time!

When I was teaching, the part I liked the most was the informal chats and discussions with the students and staff. It was this exchange of information and ideas about 'life and everything' that also attracted me to the Unitarian fellowship. It is that interaction that I missed during the lock-down months. Now as we emerge from our cocoons, I hope with your support for one another, the

MUA family can continue to strengthen its fellowship as the 'new normal' evolves. This may not be easy. However, we have all had time to sort, tidy, adapt and re-evaluate our lives this year and I am sure we will continue to look at all the challenges ahead with fresh vision and renewed vigour.

I look forward to meeting and chatting with more of you in the coming years.

Debra Burbery

~~~~~

## District Minister: Autumn Update

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

**Leading worship around the Midland Unitarian Association:** Since lockdown, 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. Our churches and chapels are slowly beginning to re-open, and I have led worship in Warwick and Shrewsbury so far, as well as Zoom services for the Birmingham and Cheltenham & Gloucester congregations. The only other one I know that is opening in September is Northampton, who will hold their first service on 18<sup>th</sup> September. I look forward to seeing all of you when I am able to visit you in person again. I am also available to conduct Rites of Passage round the District, should the need arise, and have done two funerals during lockdown.

The **Autumn Training Day** may happen on Zoom. Watch this space!

**Me and White Supremacy** I have been co-facilitating a five-session Zoom reading group on this important book by Leela M. Saad, with Rev Winnie Gordon. It has been an eye-opening, heart-opening experience. I recommend the book to everyone.

As our General Assembly meetings did not happen, Rev. Celia Cartwright (GA President), Anne Mills (GA Vice President) and I as Vice President Elect have agreed to act as a **Presidential Team** for the forthcoming year, to provide compassionate communication to all congregations in the UK.

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 down, please feel free to give me a call on 01604 870746...**

Sue Woolley, District Minister, Midland Unitarian Association

~~~~~

MUA Executive Committee Key Messages

The Key Messages below, from our May and July meetings, have already been shared in the relevant issues of *Bits & Pieces*, the monthly news-sheet sent to all congregations. Those not overtaken by time are repeated here:

1 New Executive Committee members: we were pleased to welcome Christine Thompson, of Warwick Unitarians, and Pastor Kath Forder, representing the Ministers' Meeting.

2 New EC Link: our new link member from the National Executive Committee is Robert Ince, of Fulwood Chapel, Sheffield. We were delighted to welcome him to our meeting.

3 Rev Ant Howe has left Kingswood after 14 years as their Minister. The Executive Committee offers very best wishes for his future as full-time Ministry Tutor for Unitarian College.

4 MUA Annual Lunch: After some discussion, the Committee has decided not to hold the Annual Lunch this year, as we do not want to put vulnerable people at risk. This is a source of regret to us, because it is one of the opportunities for people from all over the District to meet together in community.

Debra Burbery: tel: 01743-792722; debraburbery@yahoo.co.uk
Sue Woolley: tel: 01604-870746; revsuewoolley@gmail.com

~~~~~

## The Role of the General Assembly's Vice President

I wrote this piece as the address for a service at one of my local Unitarian churches at the end of February 2020; the congregation had requested it, and it was well-received. Most people commented that they had no idea what was involved in being the GA President or Vice-President. I have revised it somewhat; owing to the Coronavirus, it was quite out-of-date!

"In just over a month, my Vice-Presidential year will be ending---and, to me, it hardly seems possible that the time has passed so quickly! On occasions, it's been exhausting, with official engagements following one another---but I've survived! Despite the time involved, despite the busyness, I've enjoyed myself enormously! I look upon my official position and its responsibilities as "putting something back"---a job that I can do *for* the denomination, rather than taking *from* it. Being selected as the Vice-President or President is, of course, a great honour, and I've done my utmost to live up to the denomination's expectations

of me. Last April, just after my installation, one of our ministers came up to me to thank me for what I was doing "for us", as he put it. I felt very touched by the sentiment!

Practically the first decision I had to make was how to wear my medallion during my installation; Celia Cartwright contacted me to ask whether I wanted to wear it with its blue ribbon, with its silver chain, or as a brooch; I opted for the blue ribbon, which I felt was appropriate to the formality of the occasion, but, over the year, I've probably worn it more often on the silver chain. Will I have any choices to make about the President's "gong", I wonder, or will there only be one option? Time will tell! I believe it's very heavy, though! Perhaps I should start getting in training!

I must admit that, before Neville Kenyon became President, in 2010, it had never occurred to me to wonder what the basis of the appointment might be. I suppose I assumed that some kind of salary was attached and felt quite taken aback when Neville explained that this wasn't so. The President is told that he or she should never be out of pocket, so there is encouragement to claim various expenses---for travelling, overnight accommodation, meals, printing of materials used for services---and to request the preaching fee, as well. The fee is reasonable, in view of the time it takes to assemble each service, but I think other expenses really ought to be treated more flexibly, depending on each church's circumstances.

I do get the impression, from certain quarters, that people think there's a small room, at Essex Hall, where someone is employed to write all our words for us. If only there were! What the President and the V-P write is all their own work, whether that's sermons, greetings, after-dinner speeches, or messages to the nation! I have to admit that it takes longer than I could have imagined to set up arrangements, book accommodation, check

routes and post-codes, write services, and so on. Roger has helped me a great deal, for which I'm thankful---as I still have duties at Bury to carry out, and a personal life to live! But, as regards the GA greetings which are offered, I was relieved to discover that Celia's were very similar to mine, when she recently conducted a service at Bury---thank goodness! Nor is any secretarial assistance offered; if anyone wishes to invite the President or V-P to conduct a service, or to any other function, that is booked directly with the person concerned; it's a case of first come, first served! Advice given is that, before the start of the official year, holidays and other free time (at one's own church, without official duties, for example) should be booked in first.

What have I done during the past year? When I added up the number of official engagements carried out, I was quite staggered to find that it amounted to more than 50! Sometimes, I have attended as many as three services on one Sunday, and that sort of Sunday quickly raises the total! Some engagements have been at my own church, where I also carry out my duties as a church officer; I've given the GA Greetings at Bury, several times; conducted a Flower Celebration for them---plus a Manchester District Women's League AGM Service, which was held at Bury; laid the Remembrance Sunday wreath; contributed to our 300th Anniversary events, and our Candlelight Carol Service; presented the Junior Church Prizes; and acted as the Authorised Person for three weddings, including our own minister's! I seem to be on the rota for services at several of my local churches, so these are factored in, too!

Our first engagement "abroad", as it were, was at Wakefield, where we went, on Easter Sunday 2019, to offer sympathy, after they'd been burgled and their premises vandalised. This was well-received; we were made welcome and given a tour of the catacombs, and a book about them, too! But it did backfire,

somewhat, when we returned to our car, only to find that it, too, had been broken in to, and our dashcam stolen! The police were extremely helpful, and the perpetrator was caught---for quite a number of offences, our insurance company paid up, so all was more or less well!

We set off on holiday, in May, intending to call at two churches close to where we were staying: Plymouth and Evesham. Before this, we decided to have a short stay in London, where we invited ourselves to Essex Hall and a chat with Liz Slade, the new Chief Officer. The chapel at Plymouth is amazing; it's dominated by a huge oil painting of a shipwreck, which I found quite mesmerising, it was completed in 1959 by a local artist and lecturer, Jack Pickup. It is approximately ten feet wide by eighteen feet high, although it seems bigger, as it has been placed on the raised dais at the northern end of the worship-area, facing the congregation. There is no title for the painting; it's been described as a depiction of figures in a rowing-boat, on a stormy sea, and it contains a great deal of symbolism, which means that it is very much open to discussion. I would love to construct a service around this painting, as I find it fascinating---one day, maybe! When I presented the greetings to the Plymouth congregation, they actually applauded, at the end---something which has never happened since! I should point out here, that, if I give the greetings as part of one of my services, I keep them fairly short, but, if I present them during somebody else's service, I write a short piece, which lasts for 2 or 3 minutes and is as appropriate to the occasion as possible.

When I was invited to greet the North West Provincial Assembly members, as part of their AGM proceedings, at Monton, last summer, I wrote a piece which explained my links with the Unitarian church there; my mother was a member, as a young woman, and it is where my parents were married, in 1945. Too

late, I discovered that hardly anybody from Monton was present, so my words of wisdom fell on rather uncomprehending ears! My speech to the Hibbert Trust trustees was appreciated, though; I'd been asked to give a short, light-hearted, after-dinner talk, so I chose a series of anecdotes from different spheres of my working-life, pointing out that, humorous though they all were, they had contributed fully to my life-experience and had stood me in good stead later on, when my efforts were geared towards voluntary, but equally-important, work.

During the last year, I have been invited to participate in two formal Welcome Services for new ministers, as well as in two final services for ministers who were retiring. I offered some thoughts on aspects of ministry for Rev. Shammy Webster, at Stand, and for Rev. Amanda Reynolds, at Kendal. These are joyous occasions, of course---full of congratulations and positive thoughts, as everyone present celebrates. When ministers retire, however, the mood is somewhat bitter-sweet; we all acknowledge the wishes of the current minister to leave the demands of full-time work behind, but we really would prefer them not to go. Rev. Brenda Catherall, at Chowbent, retired, in January 2020, having spent thirty years as a Unitarian Minister of some eminence. In April 2019, Rev. Jim Corrigan retired from ministry to the churches of the Lancashire Collaborative Ministry (at Padiham, Rawtenstall, and Chorley), having served the LCM, and previous ministries, faithfully and well, for a total of eight years. Both will be greatly missed by their congregations and within the denomination.

As the year has progressed, I've conducted more full services, and fewer services at which I delivered greetings only. At Evesham, whilst on holiday nearby, I greeted the congregation, spent time chatting to them, after Gavin Lloyd's service, as well as looking round their chapel, and was entertained to lunch afterwards. The

Oat Street Chapel is accessed from the street through a tunnel, which means that the church is not very visible from the street. Kendal is similarly accessed, as is Whitby, which we visited, last November. Whitby is a "hidden gem", tucked away between shops and restaurants, and right in the centre of the town. Inside is a beautiful, tranquil space---simple, and with some lovely stained-glass windows; after my service there, we celebrated the Golden Wedding Anniversary of two church-members, with cards and a cake, and a good time was had by all! We also met Rev. Margaret Kirk on the previous day, for coffee, and a sneak-preview of the chapel---and to be given details of the new audio-tour recently written specially for the chapel; the members are currently discussing how to raise their profile, and their tour links in with events organised by the town's Civic Trust. We enjoyed the tour, and, as a result, we now know a great deal more about a former minister (Rev. Francis Haydn Williams, a strong character, who worked tirelessly to promote social justice issues---and not always in the most orthodox of ways, either!)

I visited Padiham again, in order to conduct their Harvest Service---a mixture of traditional and less conventional, as I led the congregation into a discussion of what might happen when or if harvests failed, and, thence, on to the subject of Fair Trade and its advantages, which is a cause dear to my heart. The previous week, we had been at Aberdeen, once more working official-duties into holiday-time. We were offered overnight hospitality by a couple from the congregation, who were very welcoming and generous; indeed, Aberdeen's congregation are a happy band, who work together harmoniously. I conducted their 186th Anniversary Service, which they enjoyed, and this was followed by a delicious lunch and much conversation. I was amused when, having enquired, as I usually do, about what to do as regards the offertory, I was told: "Oh, you don't get it---it goes straight to the treasurer; this is Scotland, don't forget"! And so it was! The

money was handed over, without further ado---no words, no prayer, no blessing! We were impressed by Aberdeen as a congregation, and sorry to learn, only a month later, that our hostess had died, very suddenly; she had seemed so full of life and cheerful when we met her, and everything she did was done willingly. She will be a sad loss to Aberdeen.

Not all my engagements are church-based, however. My old school celebrated its 60th Anniversary last July, and, as we had been invited as past pupils, I offered to attend officially. Consequently, I found myself rubbing shoulders with the Mayor and Mayoress of Bury, whom I met on several other occasions during the year, and with the school's patron, Lord Derby; I had about 5 minutes' conversation with him and discovered that not only was he easy to talk to, but also well-informed about Unitarians generally. Conversation with Lynne and John Readett informed us about The Pretoria Pit Disaster Commemoration Service, held each year, on December 21st; Lynne had been invited to lead the service---the first Unitarian Minister ever to do so, and I felt that that merited attention. More than a third of the colliers employed at Pretoria, on the Atherton/Over Hulton border, died, in 1910, when an explosion occurred in the mine, which decimated not only families in the area, but the whole community. I found the observance very moving and felt grateful that those who had perished were remembered with such obvious affection. Another moving occasion was Cross Street Manchester's Anthems for Advent---a combination of worship, music, and fund-raising for The Wood Street Mission, a charity which supports children who live in poverty, in Manchester and Salford. I was invited to offer greetings from the GA, to explain the symbolism which had inspired the event (Beacons of Light: Faith and Hope in the Dark), and to ask everyone present to give generously to a worthwhile cause. This is what Christmas should always be about!

My last Vice-Presidential engagement, as it turned out, was at the end of February; I was supposed to visit Ansdell, on the Fylde coast, but, by then, we were all in lockdown. Since then, many of my official engagements have been cancelled, including my installation as President, at our Annual Meetings. I remain the Vice-President, now, until next April (hopefully!) Many of the official engagements arranged have had to be cancelled, and those which remain must be regarded as provisional only, until we know where we stand, as regards the reopening of churches.

For the past year, I have kept a diary of my engagements; this appears regularly, in our calendar, at Bury, and the full version has been added to our website. I must stress how friendly and welcoming our reception has been, everywhere, all year, and what a pleasure it has been to visit Unitarians, up and down the country. I am full of praise for each group I have met; each, in its different way, comes together in fellowship and friendship, as part of our larger, national denomination, which currently numbers 160 congregations. *We* are the General Assembly; every one of us makes a vital contribution to it; without us all, it would cease to exist. Thank you for being an important part of the whole; and long may we continue to further our Unitarian cause, our attitudes and our beliefs! Best wishes to you all!"

**Anne Mills**

~~~~~

Sheila Godfrey, 1930 - 2020

Sheila Godfrey was born Sheila King on 29 September 1930. She passed away peacefully in her sleep at home on 9 August 2020 having battled heart failure for several years.

Sheila was born in Grimsby, Lincolnshire and educated there before going to Sheffield University, where she met fellow student

Peter Godfrey. They married whilst Peter was studying for the Ministry at Manchester College Oxford and they started married life in Tooting. Sheila had qualified as a French teacher and, apart from breaks following the births of daughters Pamela and Sarah, she taught until taking retirement when Peter became London District Minister in 1987, when they moved to Ewell, Surrey.

Before that she and Peter lived in Swinton, Altrincham and then Sheffield, places where Peter was Minister.

After Peter retired as London District Minister, they decided to move nearer to one of the daughters and moved to the same village as Pam and her family near Stroud, Gloucestershire. In retirement she took up lawn bowls and enjoyed playing in Ewell and in Stroud and very much enjoyed travelling on bowls tours.

Travelling was something which Sheila enjoyed very much. During her teaching years the family would spend most summers travelling in France, often staying with a pen friend she had from childhood. They also travelled widely in connection with Unitarianism, including visiting the United States of America on several occasions. Later on, cruising was a much-enjoyed way of seeing the world.

She accompanied Peter to Australia when he took a six-month ministry in Adelaide and made many long-lasting friends during the time there.

Sheila served as President of the Women's League and supported Peter when he was President of the General Assembly. She acted as Peter's unpaid secretary and was a huge support to him as being deaf, he was not able to communicate by telephone. She very much supported Peter in his work with Send a Child to Hucklow Fund, founded by him in 1961. She proof-read *The*

Unitarian and Faith and Freedom when Peter was the editor of those publications.

Having moved to Stroud she very much enjoyed being a hands on grandmother to Pam's children Tom and Laura and was delighted when Tom recently obtained a 2.1 in a BSc in Sport Coaching from Leeds Beckett University and proud of Laura who has an apprenticeship in accounting. She had encouraged Pam and Sarah to excel in education and in their careers and was very pleased to see Tom and Laura blossom into adulthood.

Before Sheila was immobilised by heart trouble three or four years ago she very much enjoyed visiting the Midland Unitarian churches.

Sheila will be very much missed by her family and by everyone who knew her.

Sarah Benfield (Peter and Sheila's daughter)

Peter and his family are very grateful to Rev Mark Hutchinson for the excellent funeral service and to so many people in the Midland Unitarian Association who have sent messages of sympathy - these are very much appreciated.

~~~~~

## **Reflection on Prayer to God**

Dear God,

I wonder if you ever get tired of all the requests, the bargains, the confessions?

Do you ever think 'not them again' when humans bow their heads to pray?

Do you look forward to Sunday when an avalanche of Christian prayers arrive at your feet, and do you eagerly await Friday when Muslims offer their prayers? Is Shabbat still special to you?

I mean, how can you deal with humans all pretty much praying for the same thing?

Do you long for those rare occasions when you get a prayer that is different? Surely you've heard it all before by now.

And when did you last get a day off, anyway?

I really wouldn't want your job.

I'm fond of saying that there is 'something of God in everyone' but when I say that I think of it being a bit like a franchise. I wouldn't want to be the one at the top where the buck stops.

Besides, I haven't got the right qualities to be a deity.

If it were me, I couldn't cope with all the never-ending asking and pleading.

I'd get irritated with people constantly calling my name, or I'd get frustrated when I couldn't give people what they were yearning for.

I'd be sad when people stopped believing in me. I'd be hurt. I would blink back tears and whisper "but I never stopped believing in you". I'd pretend it didn't matter, but find it hard to forgive.

Who wants to be treated like they don't exist, or that they don't matter?

Who wants to get the blame for everything, yet be the one who gets turned to as a last resort?

Not me.

I'll stick to my job - being human - and you stick to yours, please.

It's just that this being human can be tough, too. Especially at the moment. It's not been easy these last few months.

Granted, some are doing ok but there are others - people like me - who need some guidance, a higher power to turn to. I guess that's where you come in.

So God, when I pray strange prayers like this, I hope you are interested (or if not interested then at least listening).

I don't expect miracles or instant answers - we've travelled together long enough for you to know that you don't have to do that stuff with me. You really don't have to impress me, even though I do show off at times in the hope of impressing you. If I'm honest I suppose I do that because - just occasionally - I'd still like to know I have your attention.

I've gone on longer than I meant to, yet again. I guess there are thousands and thousands of others waiting their turn, or trying to push in. It's ok, I know I'm not the only one - and I don't want to be - but thank you for the times you indulge me and make it feel (just for a moment) like it's just me and you running the family business.

I'm glad you don't let me think that for long, though, because I need others in my life.

And thank you for the times I get to feel like you are interested in what I have to say. Even if you've heard it all before, you're too polite to tell me that.

Oh, and all that 'divine love' I keep talking about and that so many of us long for... keep a bit for yourself, because it can't be easy being you.

Amen

**Ant Howe (former minister, Kingswood)**

~~~~~

Modern slavery and the work of the Medaille Trust during lockdown

The Medaille Trust is the largest provider of safe housing for victims of modern slavery. They do a wonderful job protecting the survivors of modern slavery whilst also playing a role in the prosecution of those responsible for this awful crime.

It is a small charity with a dedicated team who all play various roles in supporting the survivors on their journey from victim to re-integrated members of society. This takes a lot of time and effort particularly for those from other countries who do not speak English.

The Medaille Trust is passionate about spreading awareness of modern slavery which is a crime that many people are simply not aware of. It is vital that people are able to spot the signs of modern slavery as tragically, it is happening in towns and cities all over the UK.

During the Covid crisis, we had to cancel all our public speaking engagements which is a real shame as it meant a big dip in our income. I was taken on as an anti-slavery envoy last autumn and hadn't really had a chance to get going in my role! However, I taught English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in a previous job, so they asked if I could start teaching some of their clients under lockdown in their safe houses.

I can honestly say that it has been one of the most rewarding tasks I have ever done. I was really nervous of the obvious challenges (getting to grips with technology) and forming relationships

online, but it has worked well. Initial sessions of 20 minutes have easily turned into an hour and it feels like real progress has been made. One of my learners told me yesterday that he now wants to learn Chinese and German, and also wants to design car-safety technology. He has only been here two years! I have no doubt that he will achieve his aims in life. Another gentleman is 63 and tells me he is happy to remain here and get a job as a cleaner. He now feels safe and happy. Two really different people but they are both on the path to personal fulfilment and stability.

Joanne Brown, Birmingham

~~~~~

## **Just for Today by Anonymous**

The following was given to my Auntie Irene and I inherited it along with other papers when she died. I think it was given to her at around the time her only child, my cousin Simon John, died. I understand that some of the 12 step programmes use it.

**Just for today** I will try to live through this day only, and not tackle all my problems at once. I can do something for twelve hours that would appal me if I felt I had to keep it up for a lifetime.

**Just for today** I will be happy. This assumes to be true what Abraham Lincoln said, that “Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be.”

**Just for today** I will adjust myself to what is, and not try to adjust everything to my own desires. I will take my “luck” as it comes and fit myself to it.

**Just for today** I will try to strengthen my mind. I will study. I will learn something useful. I will not be a mental loafer. I will read something that requires effort, thought and concentration.

**Just for today** I will exercise my soul in three ways: I will do somebody a good turn, and not get found out; if anyone knows of it, it will not count. I will do at least two things I don’t want to do – just for exercise. I will not show anyone that my feelings are hurt; they may be hurt, but today I will not show it.

**Just for today** I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress becomingly, keep my voice low, be courteous, criticize not one bit. I won’t find fault with anything, nor try to improve or regulate anybody but myself.

**Just for Today** I will have a program. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it. I will save myself from two pests: hurry and indecision.

**Just for today** I will have a quiet half hour all by myself and relax. During this half hour, sometime, I will try to get a better perspective of my life.

**Just for today** I will be unafraid. Especially I will not be afraid to notice what is beautiful and to believe that as I give to the world, so the world will give to me.

**Diane Rutter, (from Kingswood Newsletter)**

~~~~~

Special Poem for Older Folk

A row of bottles on my self
Cause me to analyse myself.
One yellow pill I have to pop
Goes to my heart so it won’t stop.

The purple pill goes to my brain
 And tells me that I have no pain.
 The capsules tell me not to wheeze,
 Or cough, or choke, or even sneeze.
 The red ones, smallest of them all,
 Go to my blood so I won't fall.
 The orange ones, so big and bright,
 Prevent my leg cramps in the night.
 Such an array of brilliant pills,
 Helping to cure all of my ills.
 But what I'd really like to know...
 Is what tells each one where to go?

Contributed by Ann Harrison

~~~~~

## District Round-up

### Shrewsbury update

Since May SUC trustees have had lots of online chats about opening for services and risk assessment documents were prepared (and are regularly updated in light of new regulations). We surveyed the congregation and decided to try opening in September in light of the replies we got. We are open for private prayer by members of the congregation if they make an appointment with our Church Administrator and only come in when she is around. We are going to see how the services go in September, but we are willing to adapt and change as necessary. For example, just have services on alternate Sundays. The trustees have met (socially distanced + masks) and discussed it.

The organ restoration is in the last phase, but we are having to find extra funds as costs have increased.

We open the front door of the church building on Tuesdays, so that the local food hub can display their wares to the passing public on tables and most of the time all the food disappears! (The inner doors are kept shut so no-one can enter the body of the church building).

We are continuing to disseminate the online services via USBs to the members of the congregation who are not on the internet and the Zoom coffee and chat meetings after online services on a Sunday morning have gone down well.

The church is re-opening for Sunday worship on 6<sup>th</sup> September.

**Debra Burbery**

~~~~~

News from Warwick

Gavin Lloyd bravely ventured over to Warwick in July to re-launch us after the lockdown, and to enjoy with us the enormous pleasure of being together again. He was followed by Diane Rutter, Sue Woolley and Jeffrey Bowes. We are very grateful to those who have come to take our services as, despite the difficulties we are operating under, it has been a joy to do something approaching normal, and to catch up with one another.

Our Chairman, Malcolm Burns, spent some time organising the Chapel for the Covid requirements. We have hand gel, anti-viral spray and wipes, clearly marked routes for entrance and exit, the use of only one toilet (to simplify cleaning), every chair carefully measured at 2 meters distance, and a closed kitchen. As well as all these measures we all wear face-masks during services, except for the person taking the service, and of course (perhaps the greatest

deprivation!) we are not allowed to sing the hymns. Instead of hymn singing we add variety to the services by listening to music from the piano, recorded music, or recorded hymns from *Sing Your Faith* and *Hymns for Living*.

On a personal note, I have been socialising more at home particularly with friends in gardens when the weather was good. We also have family who share our bubble. Our daughter Imogen is a breast-cancer nurse so we were unable to see her for a long time, however for the last few weeks she has been able to have a Covid test every week so that after a clear test she is able to visit us, much to our delight.

In a recent friendly get together with two other couples in our village we talked about the positive aspects of the lockdown which included: the visible resurrection of nature after only about 2 weeks, including blue skies and lots of butterflies and birdsong; the growing awareness that we must take much more care of our planet; the joy of not having to drive or, if we did drive, to be on quiet roads; the extended time to read books, play music, learn a language, make our gardens beautiful or sort our cupboards and paint the walls; the opportunity to learn how to use more modern technology; and one friend said he has now lost the fear of approaching retirement knowing now that he can easily fill and enjoy his own time. It was surprisingly easy to find many positive things about the lockdown!

Despite these positives we are still longing for life to return to normal, and for a possible vaccination and the end of face-masks. Let's hope that time will come before too long. We hope this particularly for those people who have had to deal with lockdown while living alone.

Meanwhile we at Warwick Chapel send all our best wishes to other members of the Midland Unitarian Association who are bravely venturing into opening up again during September.

Elaine Nomura

~~~~~

## Spirit

I struggle to write about abstract nouns; and you don't get much more abstract than 'Spirit'. 'Spirit of Life, come unto me' we sing, with feeling, because it's a great hymn. But what on earth do we mean? What or who are we invoking here and to what end?

I first sang this hymn at a Unitarian group gathering at the Nightingale Centre at Great Hucklow. It was before the 'Purple' hymnbook came out and it was new to me, although already known to many Unitarians. We sang it, spontaneously as I recall, in the closing session of a wonderful weekend of talks, activities, friendship, silliness and worship. I felt...inspired.

The letters of 'Spirit' are contained within the word 'inspiration'. I assume (I haven't checked) that they have the same linguistic root. For me anyway they are closely linked. Inspiration – taking in what we need to sustain us – literally – breathing, metaphorically – what we need to live creatively as human beings. I don't mean artistic creativity, but the creative energy that allows us to live our fullest lives and to give out (expiration?) in turn to sustain others and the world around us.

I see Spirit as a sort of creative energy which we may find in faith, in community, in worship, in nature, in...something else. The fuel that powers our truest and fullest living.

**Alison Patrick, Shrewsbury**

~~~~~

When it came to the Holy Spirit – Holy Ghost question in your questionnaire (for Sue Woolley’s book *Unitarians: Together in Diversity*) I thought of “Tongues of Fire, speaking in tongues and conducting miracles from the New Testament, plus the third part of the connected trinity – so patriarchal.

I prefer the family trinity as coming from ancient Jewish times as related in *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*. “Father God of Power and Omnipresence, Mother God of Creation and Birth, Child of God of Unconditional Love.” Or similar, if the Spirit of Life and Love has to be presented in a family context as was necessary in the past.

So although in the questionnaire, my answer drew a blank, now Spirit has to mean ‘Inner Presence’. That Presence I am aware of on a daily basis now, but not all the time – when mini miracles happen in my day as they fall into place. I lose touch and pick up the wrong thread. However, it is a case of awareness and I am improving.

There is a second ‘Spirit’ that I have become aware of recently, that has a very practical application and that is ‘The Voice of Compassion’ as relayed through Anthony Williams’ *Medical Medium*. Since the age of four, Anthony had this voice speaking to him, telling him the illnesses people were suffering from. This started with a family meal gathering, where he was told to go over

to his grandmother. He put his hand on her chest and said, “chest cancer”, which the next day was found to be correct and caught just in time surgically. The rest of his childhood was spent being taught, deepening this skill. Not a usual childhood. At ten, he climbed to the top of a very high tree to say “Please, God, can you find someone else to do this – I just want to be an ordinary boy.” Before that, he asked the Voice, whom he called ‘Spirit of the Most High’, who he really was. He was told, “I am the Voice of Compassion and I sit at the right hand of God. Who says that He has provided on Earth every food, herb and spice to treat every ill that humanity suffers from.” So Anthony William’s books explain what causes chronic sickness in detail and how this can be treated naturally by God-given foods.

Margaret Harris, Shrewsbury

~~~~~

I love the words of Quaker, Stephen Allott, “It was this Spirit of God which breathed into our human clay to make us living souls.” This is something I have come to believe over the past few years, through reading the works of the great Celtic poet and theologian, John O’Donohue. He wrote, and I have come to believe (because it makes sense to me) that our souls come from elsewhere, and inhabit our human bodies, our “clay”, and go elsewhere after death. Our souls are animated by the Spirit – it is the Spirit that enables us to respond to the Divine in the world.

One of the most obvious ways in which the Spirit works within us (at least to me) is when we respond to something beautiful. Who has not felt their heart lift and their level of joy soar when contemplating a majestic mountain, or the endlessly changing sea, or the intricacies of a flower, or a man-made work of art, or the

face of someone you love? Who has not thrilled to the sound of uplifting music or the songs of birds in the springtime, or the sound of a beloved voice? I believe that this is the Spirit within us recognising and responding to the beauty of the world all around us.

How can we learn to listen to the Spirit, and to recognise her at work in the world and in our hearts? I think that this may be attempted by what I would call 'sacred living' – recognising that God / the Spirit / the Divine Other is present, everywhere, all the time. Sacred living is about weaving moment of attention into our everyday lives and recognising the sacred there. It is about living with a new level of awareness. It is about going through our days paying attention to what is happening in each passing moment. It is about noticing the presence of the divine, the numinous, everywhere; in the natural world, in other people, in ourselves and in things that happen to us. Sacred living is about rediscovering our sense of wonder and living our lives in response to that.

### Sue Woolley



## MUA Congregations: Contact Details

| Name                    | Contact           | Details                                          |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Birmingham              |                   | unitariannewmeetingbirmingham@yahoo.co.uk        |
| Cheltenham & Gloucester | Alison Thursfield | 01242 254825<br>ajthursfield@tiscali.co.uk       |
| Coventry                | Francesca Rogers  | info@coventryunitarians.org.uk                   |
| Cradley                 | Sheila Powell     | 01384 838729                                     |
| Dudley                  | Barbara Russell   | 01902 650168<br>barbara-russell@blueyonder.co.uk |
| Evesham                 | Lesley Harris     | 01242 573927<br>agonoid@gmail.com                |
| Kidderminster           | Peter Markey      | Petermarkey05@hotmail.co.uk                      |
| Kingswood               | Mick Bridgman     | 0121 628 1458<br>michael.bridgman@cantab.net     |
| Northampton             | Sue Woolley       | 01604 870746<br>revsuewoolley@gmail.com          |
| Oldbury                 | Pamela Rose       | 0121 422 0311                                    |
| Shrewsbury              | Fiona Checkley    | 07487 531 913<br>shrewsburyunitarians@gmail.com  |
| Stourbridge             | David Mearman     | 01384 376478<br>davidmearman@hotmail.com         |
| Warwick                 | Elaine Nomura     | 01926 611964<br>emtnomura@aol.com                |



**The Winter 2021 issue will be published in January**

**Please may we have your contributions on local matters,  
and on the theme of “Looking Forward to a Better Year”**

**by Friday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

**Thank you!**