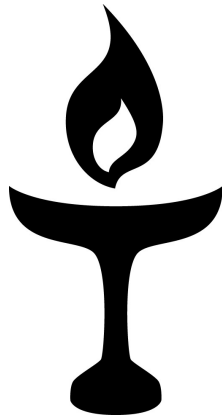


MU NOW



THE MAGAZINE OF THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

ISSUE 62

SPRING 2021

www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk

Officers of the Midland Unitarian Association

THE PRESIDENT

Ms. Debra Burbery,
23a Ashford Way, Pontesbury, Nr. Shrewsbury SY5 0QT
Tel: 01743-792722 e-mail: debraburbery@yahoo.co.uk

VICE PRESIDENT

Ms. Cressida Pryor,
12, Cheltenham Road, Winchcombe, Glos. GL54 5ND
Tel: 01242-604120 e-mail: zenziallink@hotmail.com

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Ms. Diane Rutter,
2, Packhorse Cottage, Packhorse Lane, Hollywood B47 5DH
Tel: 0787-1215-920 e-mail: dianerutter2004@yahoo.co.uk

SECRETARY / DISTRICT MINISTER

Rev. Sue Woolley, BA, MPhil, Dip RS (Open), Cert.Min.
5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN
Tel: 01604-870746 e-mail: revsuewoolley@gmail.com

TREASURER

Mr Sandy Ellis. TD, BA, FCMA
The Hermitage, Sale Green, Nr. Droitwich, Worcs. WR9 7LN
Tel: 01905-391607 e-mail: sandyellis1932@gmail.com

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.

In this issue:

MUA Officers and Aims of the Executive Committee	2
From the Editor	4
President's Piece	5
MUA District Minister Spring Update	6
MUA Executive Committee Key Messages	7
MUA AGM a success	8
Unitarian College 2021 by Helen Mason	8
Two book reviews by Peter Godfrey & Sue Woolley	11
Pastoral Care of the Bereaved	15
"This I Believe"	16
Violins of Hope by David Mearman	23
What Unitarians can learn from William Blake by David Taylor	27
The "New Normal"	31
MUA Congregations: Times of Services	34
MUA Congregations: Contact Details	35

From the Editor

Welcome to the Spring 2021 issue of *MU Now*. There are some fascinating contributions, including the latest news from Unitarian College, *Violins of Hope* by David Mearman and *What Unitarians Can Learn from William Blake* by David Taylor. And some wonderful credos from various people, penned as a result of Helen Mason's challenge at the AGM. As well as two book reviews, reports of the AGM and Spring Training Day and some reflections on the theme of "the new normal".

Once our churches, chapels and meeting houses are open once more, I hope for a bumper crop of articles for the *District Round Up* in the next issue. 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.

The theme for the next issue is "Gratitude and Thanksgiving" and the deadline for submissions will be **Friday 3rd September 2021**.

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



A few weeks ago, I found myself absorbed watching a snooker match on TV. A youngish player was beating the reigning world champion and it was quite exciting (well, for snooker anyway!) as the outcome was balanced on the last game. The youngster had gained the upper hand and could win with just a few coloured snooker balls left on the green baize table. The climax came as he had just to 'pot' one coloured ball to win the match and knock out his opponent. At first, he seemed to want to rush ahead and get it all over with. He leant down to play but then stood up straight again, stepped back, took a breath, then refocussed and calmly, quietly and gently hit the winning ball into the pocket.

This example of someone taking a moment to calmly reassess his next move at a most nerve wracking of times and to produce one of the momentous achievements in his sporting career seemed so very apt for all of us to follow as we find ourselves in the midst of society opening up after the year we've just been through.

Many of us have, perhaps, had a Covid vaccination or two by now. Been out and about a bit and socialized more than we had done in the previous six months or year. However, perhaps now is the time for us to pause and stop ourselves from rushing headlong into the 'new normal'. The motto from a road crossing campaign from a few years ago comes to mind, "Stop, Look and Listen". We could apply this to many situations in our lives and maybe now we should try to do this a little more often than we did in the past. Especially if this last year has made you feel a little more vulnerable.

Should we stop before we rush into whatever we are going to do and take a breath? Are we looking carefully at what is coming our way? Do we listen to what is being said to us - really listen? Are we taking time to stop, look and listen to that 'inner voice'?

Or maybe you have the urge to open all the doors and take advantage of the opportunities that are appearing in front of us as we run into the lush, green fields of those sunny summer uplands that we've been promised for the future? I do hope that you can take time and not rush too much and occasionally be still, appreciate the world around you and carry-on showing compassion to our fellow living beings as we emerge into whatever the 'new normal' turns out to be.

Debra Burbery

~~~~~ District Minister: Spring 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 the beginning of the first 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. Now it looks as though we are finally coming out of lockdown and will be able to meet again in person. Already, I have had a few invitations to lead worship in actual churches and chapels, rather than via Zoom. 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.

The **Spring Training Day**, on Pastoral Care of the Bereaved, was a great success. We are so grateful to Rev Ant Howe, Ministry Tutor of Unitarian College, for leading it with his customary skill and sensitivity. There is an article about some of what we learned on page 15.

Vice-President: I had the honour of being installed as VP of the General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches on 24th April.

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...

Sue Woolley, District Minister, Midland Unitarian Association

~~~~~

## MUA Executive Committee Key Messages

The Key Messages from our January meeting, have already been shared in the relevant issues of *Bits & Pieces*, the monthly news-sheet sent to all congregations. They have all been overtaken by time, so we would just like to welcome Kieren Mardle-Moss to the Executive Committee – he was elected at our AGM.

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

~~~~~

MUA AGM a success

Our AGM took place on 27th March. More than 20 Unitarians from around the District joined together on Zoom. At our business meeting, we welcomed Kieren Mardle-Moss of Coventry onto the Committee and installed Debra Burbery of Shrewsbury as President and Cressida Pryor of Cheltenham & Gloucester as Vice-President.

Then, after lunch, we enjoyed a short worship service on the theme of relighting our inward fires / inner light from Debra. Her message was that it's not what we do that matters, but how we do it – being more present, open-hearted, mindful, deeply seeing ourselves and the world.

Finally, we listened to our Guest Speaker, Helen Mason, Director of Unitarian College, give a fascinating presentation about Unitarian College (see below), which exists mainly to train ministry students at present. But this Spring, they have also run the Worship Studies Course Foundation Step online and have plans to produce other courses for Unitarians generally.

She finished by challenging us all to produce up to 350 words on the theme 'This I believe' in 15 minutes (see page 16 for some of them).

~~~~~

## Unitarian College: 2021

**Helen Mason**, Director of Unitarian College, was our Guest Speaker at the MUA AGM at the end of March. Part of her report about the activities of Unitarian College is below.

Ministry Training: Unitarian College now has six students training for Unitarian Ministry and one student training for Ministry in the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland. Our first Ministry student, Reverend Stephanie Bisby, successfully completed her training in summer 2020 and has taken up a pulpit with York Unitarians. Thanks so much to all of you who joined us for Stephanie's online valedictory service last November.

We are expecting another five Ministry students to complete their training during 2021 and we are currently awaiting confirmation from the GA Interview Panel about our 2021 intake of new Ministry students, but we are confident that we will have some new students joining the College later this month.

Whilst we have been able to continue our activities virtually uninterrupted during the last year, we are delighted to be planning our first in-person residential at Luther King House in Manchester in late May.

Ministry training is entirely individualised, and our students are following unique pathways that will ensure they qualify in two, three or four years, depending on their individual learning plan. Ministry training consists of five elements:

- Academic theology
- Unitarian College residenceals
- Two congregational or project placements
- Online learning
- Ministry in the Making (delivered by the Hibbert Trust)

Worship Studies Course: The College, concerned about the impact of lockdown on our denomination's ability to train new worship leaders, has been working with the Worship Studies Group and has created an online version of the Worship Studies Foundation Step. The course is being held on zoom and two

groups are currently running, one on Tuesday mornings, the other on Saturdays. The Tuesday group has nine participants, and the Saturday group has seven.

Another online Foundation Step programme is planned and well recruited for June 2021 and we are also looking at the feasibility of enhancing the Intermediate Step with some online learning later this year.

If you know anyone who would like to improve their worship leadership skills in fellowship with other Unitarians, please ask them to get in touch.

Zoom Clinics: The College has led 19 Zoom clinics since November to help Unitarians improve their Zoom skills in a safe and supportive space. Feedback has been very positive. Zoom clinics are free and still advertised on our website and will be put on as demand dictates. The College is pleased to be supporting the General Assembly in helping people access the Annual Meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> April via Zoom.

Mentor training: This programme is nearing completion. 13 active and retired Ministers have been trained to provide mentoring to Ministry students. My grateful thanks go to Michael Dadson for his considerable work on this project. The training means we now have a pool of high-quality mentors to draw on to support students coming into training.

Online courses: Unitarian College has developed online courses in UK Unitarian History and UK Unitarian Administration and Governance with significant help from Rev Rob Whiteman and his team of experts. These courses are currently being followed by our Ministry students. Later this year we plan on opening these

courses to any interested Unitarians in return for an affordable fee.

We are also working on the development of a free introductory online course for those wishing to learn more about Unitarianism. It is hoped that this will be available later this year.

The College is pleased to be a part of the Transformers project led by Evesham Unitarians which is seeking funding to deliver a wide range of transformational activities which will enable the denomination to capitalise and build on activities developed during the pandemic. This includes an online element including the development of online activities for children and young people.

Chaplaincy training: The College is in the process of developing training for those Unitarians who are currently working as chaplains in a range of settings including hospitals, hospices, education institutions, armed services groups, and civic settings. The course is due to commence in Autumn 2021 and will cover what Unitarians can uniquely bring to chaplaincy in the UK.

~~~~~

Two Book Reviews

***Reflections and Prayers* by Penny Johnson and Peter Hewis.** (£5 plus postage from Amazon. *By the kindness of the authors all proceeds are for the Send a Child to Hucklow Fund.*)

Penny and Peter are well known in the Midland Unitarian Association. They have both had long and successful ministries during which they became widely respected within the Unitarian movement and beyond. Penny and Peter are now enjoying well-

earned retirements but they haven't stopped their active involvement in things Unitarian.

The most recent fruit of their continued involvement is the publication of this excellent book of 'reflections and prayers'. These reflect the wide experiences of the two authors. One section is actually called *Parables from Experience*. In this Penny looks wisely at the parables of Jesus and their relationship to modern human experience, but all of the contributions to the book spring from the writers' deep concern for people for whom and with whom they have been involved during their lives. This is often serious as people face ill health and the loss of loved ones, but - not surprisingly from these two people - there is much humour in the book, sometimes at the authors' own expense. At one service described by Penny a little boy looked up at the choir and said, 'Look Mum, there are the Muppets'.

Peter has a delightful account of how when he was minister in Bethnal Green, London, he saw a couple reading one of his Wayside Pulpit notices. The man turned to the woman, hugged her and gave her a kiss. The Wayside Pulpit? - 'If you love someone then tell them before it's too late!' Peter uses these words to close his reflection on *Aspects of Love – before and after Lloyd Webber!* The reflections are all positive and encouraging including the power of love, just mentioned, and being encouraged and encouraging, appreciating the little things in life, learning from non-human animals and put simply, with profound implications – enjoying Life.

The prayers, naturally, have varied themes: for the different season of the year, for friends, pets, funerals, church anniversaries and so on. Some of them are for specific occasions. For example there is one for the 350th anniversary of Coventry's Unitarian presence and seventy-five years in its present building. This

includes a reference to Rev. Richard Lee, the minister when I joined The Great Meeting House about seventy-seven years ago. Does anyone else remember that dear man? This prayer, like all of them can be adapted for current use. All of them provide good material for meditations.

The authors acknowledge the great help given in the production of the book by the Manchester District Association and its Administrator, Natasha Stanley. I obtained copies of the book by using Amazon Smile. Using this means that Amazon gives a small percentage of the cost of purchase to the Send a Child to Hucklow Fund if you nominate it as your chosen charity. It is a small amount but as Penny points out in one of the reflections, little things add up and have power. Penny quotes the saying, "Anyone who thinks they are too small to make a difference has not been in bed with a mosquito."

Peter Godfrey

~~~~~

***Beyond Darkness: Words for Reflection* by Cliff Reed (Lindsey Press, 2021 ISBN 978-0-85319-095-0 £9)**

I have been waiting eighteen months for this book to come out! The Midland Unitarian Association invited Cliff Reed to be our Guest Speaker at our Annual Lunch in October 2019, and he gave us some sneak previews of the material contained in this volume.

And now I have it in my hands. I am not disappointed. Cliff is a gifted and prolific writer, whose previous collections of worship material and reflections have been widely read and much used in Unitarian worship services. I have personally made extensive use of the last three (*Spirit of Time and Place*, *Sacred Earth* and *Carnival of Lamps*) during this period of lockdown. Having asked Cliff's

permission last March, which was freely given, I have found these volumes (all still available from Lindsey Press) invaluable.

This latest collection is somewhat different, however. The other three are potentially of more use to the worship leader, as each has specific sections on gathering words and chalice lightings, blessing and dismissal words, prayer and the circling year, which last is fabulous for seasonal services. Yes, *Beyond Darkness* does include a section on worship and another on seasons, but I miss the separate sections on gathering, dismissal and prayer. There is some great worship material in this volume, but you have to search for it.

That said, there are some wonderful reflections and prayers in *Beyond Darkness* – about the nature of love, about war and peace, about the need to care for the planet, and about the suffering in the world, as well as words for two lovely communion services, one for Lent, the other for Advent. Having had a good read through (more than once), my stand-out favourites include some lovely words for extinguishing the chalice, *Sunlit Smoke*, a moving reflection on the plight of refugees, *New Exodus*, and a fabulous *Preacher's Prayer*, which I predict will be used often in future ministerial induction services. As well as many thought-provoking pieces, which would make excellent readings in any service, for example, *God Isn't*, *Defenders*, *Dilemma*, *Do You Remember Elephants?* and *In a time of fear*, to name but a few which have caught my eye, as well as some sensitive readings for various rites of passage.

All in all, this is well worth any worship leader's nine quid, and I hope it sells many copies.

**Sue Woolley**

## Pastoral Care of the Bereaved

Ten people from eight MUA congregations gathered on Zoom on 8<sup>th</sup> May to participate in a fascinating day about how to provide pastoral care for the bereaved. The day was led and organised by Rev Ant Howe, Ministry Tutor of Unitarian College, and was led with his customary skill and sensitivity.

He introduced us to the symptoms and process of grief and underlined the fact that bereaved people are the largest community in the world. Ant explained that they need to talk about their loss, as grief touches every aspect of our lives. He suggested ways of encouraging this and underlined the importance of listening to how people feel rather than imposing or projecting our own feelings. He stated that being able to talk about and listen to death honestly is the first step of pastoral care of the bereaved. He also suggested other ways in which members of a congregation might be able to support a bereaved person.

Very often, only one question is needed, “Would you like to tell me what happened?” It is necessary to hold the space for people to talk, making few comments, asking few questions (except clarifying ones, which might encourage the person to share their feelings). Ant warned us never to make assumptions about how someone is feeling, and to avoid unhelpful clichés like, “I know how you feel”, “They’ve had a good, long innings” and so on.

In the afternoon, Ant led us in a ritual to honour loved ones we have lost and suggested it could be an annual event in a Unitarian congregation. He then moved on to speak of pastoral care of the dying, again emphasising the importance of honesty, and of holding a safe and sacred space for them to share what is on their minds and hearts. He then went on to speak about the grieving cycle, first identified by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: Denial, Anger,

Bargaining, Despair and Acceptance. He explained that the role of the pastoral carer was to walk with people through these stages, which might not be linear, simply holding space for them to express what they are feeling. He reminded us that grief has no timetable and no rules.

He concluded by suggesting that when we come out of the present lockdown, there will be the need for some kind of recognition to express what we have all gone through, including memorial services for people who couldn’t attend funerals. Ritual can help us to work through these feelings of grief and loss.

The atmosphere throughout the day was very special – participants shared their experiences of bereavement freely, and I think we all felt that it had been a hugely useful day, which would help us as members of MUA congregations to help others who have been bereaved.

## ~~~~~ “This I Believe”

*As mentioned in the report of the District AGM on page 8, our Guest Speaker, Helen Mason, challenged us to produce a 350 word credo in fifteen minutes. Some of the results are below. My thanks to the authors for being brave enough to share them.*

“I believe that there is that of God in everyone – a divine spark, which you might call the “soul”, which enables us to reach out to each other in love and compassion.

I believe that the Divine is everywhere – in you, in me, in every person, and also in animals, birds and the rest of the natural world. The whole world is sacred – we just need to open our eyes and hearts and recognise that.



I believe that this divine part of us is pure and innocent and untouchable by the ups and downs of life and that we are able to access it through doing deep spiritual work and hence come home to ourselves.

I believe that everyone has the right to seek out what gives their lives purpose and meaning in their own way, so long as they do not harm others. And that a Unitarian community is the ideal place in which to undertake this journey. Where we can explore deep (or even daft) ideas with each other, knowing that our words will be received with respect, even if others disagree. And that we can bring our authentic, deepest selves to our Unitarian homes, knowing that loving arms will be there to support us when we falter. And friends to rejoice with us when life is going well. I believe that, given a choice, most human beings will choose to be good and kind, rather than bad and evil. That there are many reasons why people do bad things and that retributive condemnation will not help them to change.

I believe in peace – that the world would be a better, happier, kinder place were it not for the lust for power and possessions that overcomes people and governments.

I believe that you have to carry on doing the best that you can, in all the ways that you can, for everyone you can. And that the only way to do this is to start where you are, with what you have. And pray for a good outcome.”

**Sue Woolley**

\*

“I believe that all human beings are different, but each of us has aspects that we can share with others. I believe that what some people call God, for me is probably my conscience. I believe in the Quakers phrase “That of God in everyone” is what we can all

aspire to. I believe that over the years there have been many teachers and we can learn from all of them. I believe that I have wanted to be Unitarian for most of my life, and it’s taken me a long time to find it. I believe that as humans we have a responsibility to look after each other as much as we are able, but we have no right to judge others. I believe that there is good in everyone. I believe that I need more time to put this together. I believe I need more time to let my mind work on this question.”

**Anon**

\*

“This I believe... in the golden rule, that love is all there is to live by.

This I believe... that the flame of the Divine is in all of us and in all other living and non-living things.

This I believe... that we are all interconnected by some sort of 'elemental' energy.

This I believe...that nature is amazing and precious.

This I believe...that my time as this entity as a human is just a speck in the infinite but I still can have an impact.”

**Debra Burbery**

\*

“That the core of a Congregation is Love, The Chapel is a place to which the members look forward to attending. Where they feel welcome and safe. Where their views are respected and where they respect the views of their fellows. It is a Community with an active Involvement in helping others; with a belief in DOING Good and not just BEING Good.”

**Sandy Ellis**

"I believe in

Energetic forces I don't understand.

In the human need for connection to each other and our planet.

In the need to connect outside of ourselves both by helping others and acknowledging the limits of our own thoughts and actions.

In a creedless non-judgmental experiential spiritual community that challenges and is open to challenge.

In wisdom from wherever it derives, if after reasoned debate it seems on balance to indeed be wisdom.

In holding people and community through the process of healing.

In celebrating people and community in all our rites of life and death.

I believe in being the change our world needs us to be."

**Mark Hutchinson**

\*

"I believe that the universe is a unity.

I believe that there is no division between spiritual and material.

I believe that everything is material.

I believe that we are only just beginning to understand a little bit of the wonder of matter.

I believe in the immense value of the example and teaching of Jesus.

I believe the core of his teaching is caring and encouraging loving and kind relationships between people.

I believe in trying to be forgiving and being careful how I judge.

I believe in trying to find goodness in all people.

I believe in the beauty that is in the world and the need to care for and nourish all that is good and beautiful."

**Peter Godfrey**

"That we all come from one benign, sacred and mysterious energy...that some call God, the Goddess, the Universe, Love and others do not name..."

This energy is at the core of everything, every being and is everywhere...as we are all part of this energy we are all an interconnected web of consciousness. This means that violence to one is violence to us all. The central tenet of the Christian path points to this truth through Christ's teaching to 'love your neighbour as yourself'; thus showing no divide between different beings.

We are therefore in extraordinary ways all One.

This energy is ongoing and eternal; it transcends the death of the physical form that we call our material body...so when we die we return to the web of wider connection in some mysterious way. And might well reincarnate...

Many faith traditions explore these truths and have different insights and teachings that can be helpful ways to understand and be in Unitive Consciousness.

There are many practices from our own faith culture and others to deepen our non-dual consciousness and highlight the ease of slipping into divisive 'othering'

Part of our task on this earth is to serve the greater needs of all beings using the unique gifts each receives...

I endeavour to behave and have an ethical stance that flows from this understanding incorporating what Buddhists call right behaviour, right communication and extending loving kindness to all beings. I am also human and often fall short of this and pray for insight, guidance and compassion to learn anew.

Part of this learning and development is best done within a loving community where blind spots can be challenged and worked through with kindness, humanity and humour.

Julian of Norwich's insight that 'All shall be well' is the vessel that holds my deep trust in this knowing and the ultimate connection with the benign, loving holding of God.

### Cressida Pryor

\*

"I believe that everyone is free to explore their personal interpretation of their faith and spirituality. I believe in the universal spirit of life and love which some know as God. It is this belief that empowers me to open my mind to critical thought, rich discussions, and a colourful patchwork of difference in the world – this is something I know will only help deepen my understanding of myself and my world. But most of all, I believe in the power of togetherness – that we are stronger together than we are apart and able to better experience the joy of each other's company, the solidarity of our communities, and the awe and beauty of the world around us when we do this and share in this together."

### Kieren Mardle-Moss

\*

"We should go through life endeavouring to make everything better, not only for ourselves but for those around us.

We should develop a real sense of Community.

Take time to listen to those who normally we would not. During Lockdown, I have spoken to many people I would normally just exchange pleasantries. People I thought were just acquaintances have become true friends.

Unitarianism to me, isn't just a Sunday Morning, it's more a way of life. Accepting everyone around me and hoping they accept me."

### Jill Bowie

"I believe in God, about whom I can say almost nothing.

I believe there is something of God in everyone, and therefore something of good in everyone.

I believe that the search for God, or the divine, is best conducted in community, and that community may be called a church.

I believe that God, or the divine, is revealed in *everything* around us: in plants and animals, in the sky at night, and in human interaction.

I believe my life would be poorer were I not to believe in this something 'other' which to me, and maybe paradoxically, is both immanent<sup>1</sup> and transcendent<sup>2</sup>."

### David Wood

\*

"I was taught in my Unitarian Sunday School that God was like electricity. In order to gain power you just had to plug in which you did by concentrating on the problem facing you.

I still have problems with the 'let us consider the *whatever group of people are currently in trauma*' prayers as, for me, prayer is more 'This is the problem, how are we/am I going to solve it?'

We were also taught that God was a lake of goodness and when we were born an angel emptied a drip of water into us which just about filled our little toe and it was our job to live so that when we died we could return a whole bodyful of water back into the lake.

I still feel that I have a responsibility to approach problems as though I could solve them, possibly with some help and I still feel

<sup>1</sup> (of God) permanently pervading the universe

<sup>2</sup> (of God) existing apart from and not subject to the limitations of the material universe

that I am on this earth to be useful. 'We are here to help each other, if not, why?'

Also in Sunday School we were taught to *Be the best you can, do the best you can*. This does not mean that you rush off to foreign parts to save the poor lepers, it means that if you are a road sweeper you are like the road sweeper in Radcliffe. When he retired the local council put up a plaque to him. He was the go-to person for lost dogs, cats, purses, husbands. And he also just happened to be sweeping up outside the primary school at chucking-out time and he didn't leave until every child had been collected. I have often referred to my teenage intention to be a prison officer. The prison service, I opined, need caring and intelligent people like me. My uncle, a police inspector, uttered the fatal words, 'Dorothy, these people are already in prison. don't you think they have suffered enough?' And it is true, I would have undoubtedly been a very bad prison officer. I became a French teacher, probably the least useful job on earth, but I staggered my way through it without harming anyone, least of all myself.

**Dorothy Haughton**

~~~~~

Violins of Hope by David Mearman

It was the day before Holocaust Memorial Day that I found myself having the daily browse on Facebook, whilst enjoying my breakfast mug of tea, and I came across a really interesting post on the private group Facebook Violinists.

The post took me to Benning Violins in America, which revealed a most fascinating and moving article on their website. A message to Sue Woolley with the link, has now resulted in the kind permission from Benning Violins to share this article with you.

'While not intrinsically great instruments, Jewish-owned violins, cellos and violas that somehow survived the concentration camps live on in concert.

Among the many perverse facts of the Holocaust is there were camp orchestras. Talented instrumentalists from the Jewish and "Gypsy" (Roma) communities involuntarily held by the murderous regime were put to work to provide music. Their audiences were new arrivals as they disembarked from cattle cars, some as they were led to certain death while others judged healthy enough to work to barracks. Some of the musicians were forced to entertain their captors at parties.

It's impossible to not mentally summon the theme from *Schindler's List*, the 1993 movie about the Holocaust (composed and conducted by John Williams, featuring violinist Itzhak Perlman). The music performed by the camp orchestras included marches, parlour music, dance music, popular music of the day, film and operetta melodies, the works of Richard Wagner and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. In Auschwitz, composer Henryk Krol wrote *Arbeitslagermarsch*, the Concentration Camp Labour March.

Since 1996, the father and son team of Amnon and Avshalom Weinstein, based in Tel Aviv, have been collecting the violins, violas and cellos that were owned by these camp musicians before and during World War 2. The collection has grown to more than 60 instruments, each with a story: Some were used in the camps; some were tossed from those trains as they were headed to the camps. The collection is known as the Violins of Hope.

One instrument in the collection, the Auschwitz violin, was made around 1850 in Germany and was purchased in the post-War

years from a penniless survivor. Like many of the stringed instruments, it was neither rare nor valuable. Another German-made violin, circa 1900, was tossed from a train travelling from France by a desperate man who said, “In the place where I now go I don’t need a violin – here, take my violin so it may live!” A worker obliged his request but never played it. Decades later his children told the story to a violinmaker in the South of France who purchased it and turned it over to the Weinstains for the Violins of Hope project.

But Violins of Hope is more than instruments that the Weinstains have restored to playing condition. It’s a series of concerts using these instruments, held around the world, accompanied by discussions on the significance of the instruments. Despite the fact these are not Stradivarius violins, virtuosos the likes of Shlomo Mintz (Jerusalem), David Russell (music professor at the University of North Carolina) and others play them. Upcoming concerts in 2019 and 2020 are in Louisville, Kentucky; Fort Wayne, Indiana; San Francisco; and Los Angeles.

Amnon Weinstein told National Public Radio in 2012 that violins were commonly displayed on the walls of Jewish homes, particularly among Orthodox Jews who were forbidden from displaying portraits or sculpture. He was first asked to restore one such violin in the early 1960s by a musician-survivor who had been part of the Auschwitz Men’s Orchestra, but Weinstein was repulsed by the presence of ashes inside the instrument and refused to work with it – in part because he himself had lost many family members to the Holocaust.

Weinstein’s emotions on that softened by the 1990s when he launched Violins of Hope. “All instruments have a common

denominator,” he says on his website. “They had to do with the war. To be more specific, they had to do with the Holocaust – death or survival. And hope. All instruments were symbols of hope and a way to say, remember me, remember us. Life is good, celebrate it for those who perished, for those who survived. For all people.”

That clearly includes the doomed violinist on that French train. His violin miraculously survives. “The sound of violins is often compared to the beauty of the human voice,” Weinstein writes. “When played with talent and spirit, it is known to reach out and touch hearts. This was the role of violins in the war – to touch hearts, kindle hope for better times and spread it around. Wherever there was music, there was hope.”

For those who would like to see some of the numerous photographs of these wonderfully decorated instruments, and find out more on the subject, here are some links, all obtained by doing a Google Search on Violins Of Hope.

www.violins-of-hope.com

www.classicfm.com/discover-music/instruments/violin/violins-of-hope-endured-atrocities-vital-story-holocaust/

I have since acquired the book, *Violins Of Hope* by James A. Grymes, as a surprise gift from a congregational member, which is turning out to be fascinating read.

Seeing a world in a grain of sand: *What Unitarians can learn from William Blake* **by David Taylor**

The artist and poet William Blake (1757 – 1827) has always been of interest and an influence upon me. After leaving school I went to art college. Sometime in the late 1980s or early 1990s I was the runner up in an international art exhibition set up by Yoko Ono, inspired by her late husband John Lennon. Part of my prize was a small cash sum. As someone who has always loved books, I was soon off to scour the bookshops of Birmingham. It was here that I picked up a brand new Penguin book of William Blake's poems. I was hooked!

Blake was born in Soho in 1757, and for most of his life he lived and worked within 20 minutes' walk of his first family home. The son of a religious Dissenter and hosier, he attended school until he was ten years old. His parents, recognising that he had some artistic talent, bought him classical prints and plaster casts to copy, and paid for him to have drawing lessons. At fourteen, he was apprenticed to an engraver and at 21 he enrolled to study art at the Royal Academy.

From an early age it was evident that the young William was an extraordinary child. On one occasion his mother found him screaming, having been scared, he said, by the face of God looking in through a window at him. On another occasion, Blake claims to have seen a tree in Peckham Rye filled with angels.

These were times of radical thought and social upheaval. There were revolutions in France and America, wars raging across

Europe. One of Blake's patrons was the Unitarian publisher Joseph Johnson. It was through him that Blake has become associated with other radicals such as Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin and Joseph Priestley. Blake himself was a profoundly independent spirit, a man who refused to conform to established tastes and traditions. He was deeply religious, but he objected to organised religion. He championed the imagination, but he was sceptical of science. He opposed slavery, tyranny and industrialisation. He was an avid proponent of equality of the sexes. He channelled all these beliefs and opinions into his poems, prints and personal mythology.

Virtually unknown during his lifetime, Blake has since developed a huge and unique following. Today some Unitarians may have come across Blake through the three hymns in the red *Hymns of Faith & Freedom* book their congregations may still use. These are *To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love...* (313), *Can I see another's woe...* (318) and the famous *Jerusalem* (416).

It was the essence of Blake's philosophy that interested me, and how that could be relevant today. What did he have to say about subjects as diverse as nature, relationships and religion, and what could we Unitarians learn from him?

Nature

- "The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way. Some see nature all ridicule and deformity... and some scarce see nature at all. But to the eyes of the man of imagination, nature is imagination itself".
- "A fool sees not the same tree a wise man sees".
- "For everything that lives is holy, life delights in life".

- “A Robin Redbreast in a Cage, Puts all Heaven in a Rage...”
- “He who shall hurt the little Wren. Shall never be beloved by Men”.

Relationships

- “It is easier to forgive an enemy than to forgive a friend”.
- “You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough.”
- “The man who never alters his opinions is like standing water, and breeds reptiles of the mind”.
- “He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star.”
- “I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.”

The World at Large

- “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.”
- “In the universe, there are things that are known, and things that are unknown, and in between, there are doors.”
- “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is - infinite.”
- “He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God.
He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only.”



Newton illustration by William Blake

Religion

- “The glory of Christianity is to conquer by forgiveness.”
- “There is a Throne in every man, it is the Throne of God.”
- “A good local pub has much in common with a church, except that a pub is warmer, and there's more conversation.”
- “I cannot consider death as anything but a removing from one room to another.”

This is but a brief selection of some of Blake's thoughts. Far from being the 'unfortunate lunatic' that his contemporaries thought he was, Blake had a remarkably modern philosophy and outlook, one which I am sure many Unitarians would agree with - and one which the modern world could do worse than to embrace.

Further Reading:

William Blake: *The Complete Illustrated Works*. (Thames & Hudson, 2000)

Peter Ackroyd *Blake*. (Sinclair & Stevenson, 1995)

John Higgs *William Blake Now: Why He Matters More Than Ever*. (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2019)

Websites:

www.blakesociety.org
www.blakearchive.org

~~~~~

## The “New Normal”

*Only two people submitted articles about what the “new normal” might look like in their congregations...*

The Cheltenham & Gloucester congregation plan to start face to face meetings again on June 27th (unless regulations change). However, we are aware that we now have an extended group of attendees to our Zoom services who cannot get to Bayshill for various reasons, so as a start we will alternate “in person” services with Zoom ones to give everyone a change to access them. We have discussed the idea of “hybrid” services where the different services are combined but there are two basic problems: we do not have suitable equipment in the Hall; and we do not have people with the technical knowhow to run such meetings in the long term. So we have to compromise.

In the longer term, I am reluctant to try to describe what our congregation will look like as we move forward because I do not want to prescribe what develops or to stop new ideas from emerging. I think trying to say what the new normal will look like is to limit the scope of what we would like to see happening; and my ideas might preclude others from putting forward possible alternative plans.

What I will say is that I hope we look at the widest possible range of ideas, and that we can be open-minded when considering

suggestions. I hope we can be innovative and then committed to the long term in supporting whatever develops; thinking what will benefit the congregation as a whole and being open to changes. This may not be easy, but to grow we must look to the future and not just have an exercise in continuing what went before. We need to try to develop our resources whether in the physical buildings or the spiritual dimension of what we do, and we need to be inclusive of the community around and not remain in our comfort zone paying lip service to inclusivity.

We have a challenge ahead. We will need imagination, commitment and tolerance to get to where we hope our vision will lead us.

**Alison Thursfield (Cheltenham & Gloucester)**

~~~~~

I felt very inspired by the prompt for *MU Now*. But not because I know what the new normal will look like for Birmingham Unitarians. We haven’t yet started our conversations in earnest about the new normal.

What I think we do want to do is meet together in person for worship and for fellowship. Virtual is not the same. I miss everyone, and I miss the kind of in-person interactive worship that often features in Birmingham services. I know other members of the congregation feel the same. On the other hand, we have been meeting over Zoom for just over a year now, and I don’t think I want to lose everything that has brought us. So maybe the new normal should be a mix of meeting in the church building we love, and meeting virtually. Perhaps we can keep meeting with the people outside Birmingham who we’ve been fortunate to

worship with this year. And welcome new people in Birmingham and elsewhere.

In 2020, we made a commitment to anti-racism, with a unanimous motion to affirm that Black lives matter, and to support that with action. We have made some progress on this during lockdown, including being more mindful of the diversity of voices and ideas we feature in our worship. One of our members has also carried out research on racism in the UK. We have been discussing how we can take this further. The new normal should include honouring our commitments and furthering Unitarians' traditional commitment to social justice. With the new skills we have learned we can do this both virtually and in real life.

I guess I'm hoping that the new normal will be kind of like the old normal, but definitely improved by what we have learned during this last year at home.

Angela Maher (Birmingham)

~~~~~

The return to normal life is not going to be easy. I am afraid that the long-term fall-out from the coronavirus will be both difficult and complex to deal with. Not only the effect on people who have lost loved ones, although that of course is the worst, but also the number of jobs lost, companies closing down, will lead to great changes in our economy, and not for the better. Not to mention the emotional and psychological effects that being in lockdown, in isolation, for so long has had on too many people.

So we will need all the kindness, all the compassion, that we have shown to each other during this time, to work together towards a better, more compassionate society. **SW**

## MUA Congregations: Times of Services

**As we start to meet in person once more, I have reinstated this list of service times. But please contact the congregation before travelling, in case they are no longer accurate.**

### Every Sunday:

|                         |                              |          |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------|
| Birmingham              | Unitarian New Meeting Church | 11.00 am |
| Cheltenham & Gloucester | Bayshill Unitarian Church    | 11.00 am |
| Evesham                 | Oat Street Chapel            | 11.00 am |
| Kingswood               | Meeting House                | 11.00 am |
| Shrewsbury              | Unitarian Church             | 11.00 am |
| Warwick                 | High Street Chapel           | 4.30 pm  |

### First Sunday of the Month:

|             |                         |          |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------|
| Dudley      | Old Meeting House       | 3.00 pm  |
| Northampton | Unitarian Meeting House | 11.00 am |
| Oldbury     | at Dudley               | 3.00 pm  |

### Second Sunday of the Month:

|             |                                   |         |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|---------|
| Coventry    | Gt Meeting House Unitarian Church | 11 am   |
| Cradley     | Park Lane Unitarian Chapel        | 6.30 pm |
| Stourbridge | Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel   | 3.00 pm |

### Third Sunday of the Month:

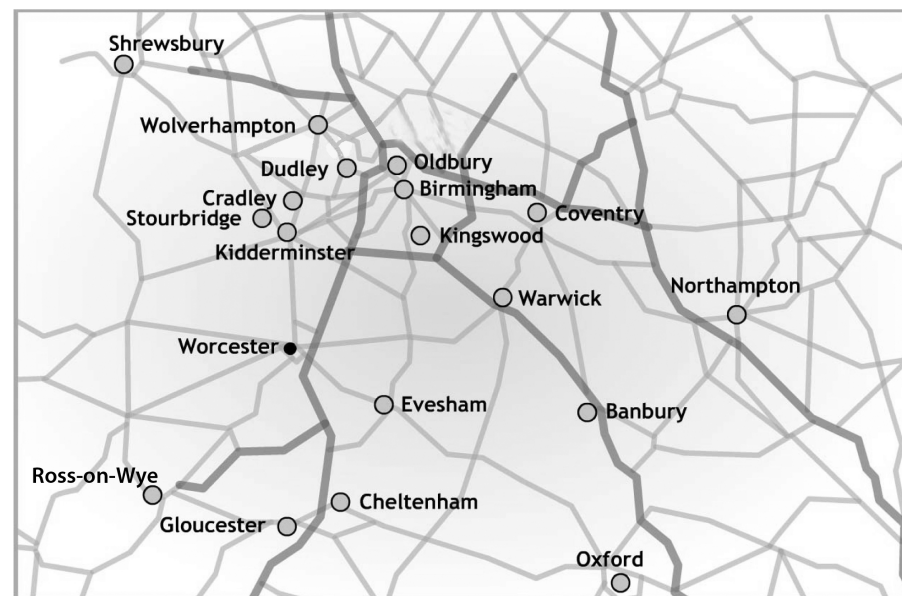
|             |                         |          |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------|
| Dudley      | Old Meeting House       | 3.00 pm  |
| Northampton | Unitarian Meeting House | 11.00 am |
| Oldbury     | at Dudley               | 3.00 pm  |

### Fourth Sunday of the Month:

|             |                                   |          |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Coventry    | Gt Meeting House Unitarian Church | 11 am    |
| Stourbridge | Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel   | 11.00 am |

## 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                |
| Kingswood               | Maria Govier      | 07816-159199<br>maria.heath@icloud.com           |
| 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 Summer/Autumn 2021 issue will be published in September.**

**Please may we have your contributions on local matters, and on the theme of “Gratitude and Thanksgiving”.**

**by Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2021**

**Thank you!**