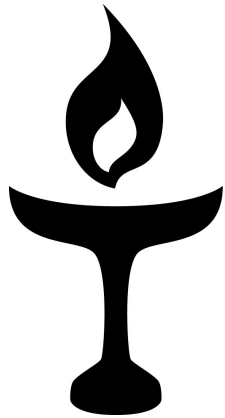


MU NOW



THE MAGAZINE OF
THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN
ASSOCIATION
ISSUE 57 SUMMER/AUTUMN 2019

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From the Editor

Welcome to the Summer/Autumn 2019 issue of *MU Now*. It is a bumper issue, with articles by Barbara Russell on Summer, our General Assembly President, Rev Celia Cartwright, on Civil & Religious Liberty, the World Over and another welcome historical article by Rev Penny Johnson, this time on the Wolverhampton Sunday School.

As well as some inspirational stories in *District Round-up*, and several contributions on the theme of Integrity.

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 "Simplicity" and the deadline for submissions will be **Friday 4th January 2020**.

sue woolley

President's Piece



I hope you have enjoyed your summer. I like the change of seasons, so I'm looking forward to the leaves turning, the crisp air, and several visits to congregations across the Midlands. I'm also starting to crave all my favourite autumnal foods.

At my workplace, autumn is marked by 'Bake-Off' season. Cake is very popular with my colleagues, so we run a large 'sweetstake' in the office. Each person draws the name of a *Great British Bake-Off* contestant from a hat and, when the contestant is eliminated, you bake a cake and bring it in to work. This year we have 45 participants across two offices, so I'm hoping to at least taste some of the cake. My favourite thing however, is not the cake, but my colleague's write ups of each episode which he shares with a few of us. He has a genuine gift for writing, and it's a real privilege to be one of the recipients of his creative talents.

I'm reminded of one of the interesting and less conventional harvest hymns that Unitarians have available to sing. Hymn 137* in the purple hymnbook (*Sing Your Faith*) begins conventionally enough with thanks for the harvest food and for the work of farmers: "Praise God for the harvest of orchard and field, Praise God for the people who gather their yield,". But instead of continuing in this vein, it goes on to talk about (among other things) the "harvest of science and skill" and the "urge to discover, create and fulfil".

If you live in a city or town as I do, it's easy for harvest time to feel remote and unconnected to daily life. But as the hymn shows, there's more than one harvest. Giving of our talents and skills forms another harvest which many more of us can enjoy reaping.

The final harvest it describes, however, is one to which all of us can aspire to; the "harvest of mercy and love". Although my plants don't grow at all well, and my creativity often feels limited, I can commit to my part making sure there is more mercy and love in the world, this autumn and in the seasons that follow.

*The melody associated, 'Stowey', is traditional even if the hymn is a little less so, so why not try it out?

Angela Maher

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## District Minister: Summer 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:** My diary for **2020** is now filled. I look forward to seeing all of you as and when. I am also available to conduct Rites of Passage round the District, should the need arise.

The **Autumn Training Day**, on the topic of *Beyond the Hymn Sandwich* will be taking place on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> November, at Unitarian New Meeting Church, Birmingham. It will be led by Christina Smith, Lay leader at Derby Unity, and promises to be an inspirational day.

Liz Slade, the new GA Chief Officer, has asked me to lead a service at the **Change Festival** at Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> October, at 3.30 pm. Why not come along?

I am a fully qualified **spiritual director**. I offer direction sessions, on a one-to-one basis. Please contact me if you are interested. Please see advert on p. 38 for further information.

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

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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. From the May meeting, grants to the two Unitarian ministry training colleges will be paid pro rata, according to the number of students attending in that academic year.
2. Social justice / social action officer: The Committee would like to co-opt someone from the District's congregations, to lead on social justice issues and to act as liaison with Citizens UK. Please e-mail Sue Woolley if you are interested in contributing to the work of the District in this way.
3. Trustee disqualification criteria: Sandy Ellis has circulated a list of these to every congregation, so that they can sign them at their next AGM. This is a Charity Commission requirement.
4. Annual Lunch will be taking place on **Saturday 26th October, at Kingswood Meeting House**. The Guest Speaker will be Rev Cliff Reed, author of *Unitarian? What's That?* and several volumes of worship material. Please put the date in your diaries. Booking forms have been circulated to Secretaries of congregations.

Angela Maher: tel: 0777-9113-175; angela.j.maher@gmail.com
Sue Woolley: tel: 01604-870746; revsuewoolley@gmail.com

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## Some Thoughts on Summer

Or, as someone once said "Summer – and some aren't." So far, it has been a definite "isn't" – isn't anything like the summer I know and love. Where's the warmth? Where's the glorious sunshine?

I see summer as a Prima Donna, a gorgeous young girl, full of herself. cat-walking on to the scene, confident that her eyes are bluer than the Vinca, her hair putting the marigolds to shame and what rose can vie with her beauty? And then, temper. Temper as black as the clouds that fill the sky, spiteful as the rain, sharp and vindictive as the lightning, as grim with rage as the growling thunder. And, as suddenly, it's all over. Blue sky peeps timidly through the white clouds, growing and glowing as His Majesty, the Sun, puts in an appearance, and we sun-lovers can relax in warm embrace. Yes, I'm a sun-lover, though It has been many years since I have tumbled out of bed just before sunrise to greet my friend, while paddling my bare feet in the morning dew!

But, alas, my friend isn't all good! The sun can ruin crops as easily as it can ripen them. It can suck water from the good Earth and make a desert of what should be fertile fields.

I often think of Theodore Parker\*, who wanted a religion 'that, like the sunshine, goes everywhere'. It doesn't, I'm afraid, Mr Parker. It does not reach into the dank and deep interior of caves. It's true I don't want a religion – just a faith. A faith that will endeavour to reach the sometimes deep and dark caverns of the human mind. Not a faith that can be lost in shadows of despondency or despair, but a faith that will do its best to banish

sorrow without condemning it as weakness. Even our good Mother Earth turns away from sunshine each evening – rather a faith that the world turns to – and here I am very much with Mr. Parker – ‘its temple, all space’.

There are places where the sun barely sets for half the year; you can have too much of a good thing – and, how welcome the velvet shades of night after the glare of sunlight! How welcome a faith that knows no turning. As the hymn says, “Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father; there is no shadow of turning with thee.” (54, Red Book; T.O. Chisholm)

The Corinthians (1-13:13) are told ‘and now remaineth faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love’ and faith comes a VERY close second!

\*Theodore Parker – 19<sup>th</sup> century Transcendentalist Unitarian minister

**Barbara Russell**

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To Civil and Religious Liberty, the World Over

During the days of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, this toast was once frequently given. It has now rather fallen out of fashion and is rarely heard, save for here and a few other places, mostly in the north of England, including Rivington in Lancashire during the Pilgrimage lunch. The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (GA) has in its current constitution an object which affirms the worth and dignity of all people which is best served where the mind and conscience are free; which is, as Alan Rushton says, a fine sounding but rather tame statement. Where is, he goes on to ask, the GA civil rights and freedoms department, which forbears in the B&FUA

maintained? Except as expressed by individuals it can be argued that Unitarians have lost their fire in the pursuit of civil and religious liberty the world over, though perhaps recently this has begun to change. ‘Seemingly’ Alan Rushton declares, ‘in the twenty-first century they have become more involved in its pursuit’. I hope it is true.

As to why the fervour for this toast has gone out of fashion, I suspect it is because we, ourselves, that is, already have our civil and religious liberty. The fight for others calls for more altruism than perhaps we have.

It is hard for us to put ourselves in the mind-space of those men and women who struggled through bigotry and hatred, accusations of heresy and treason, prison sentences and loss of possessions, to bring about this faith we cherish, with all its freedom and its reason and its tolerance and respect for the beliefs of others. It is hard to understand the strength of their faith. The strength that defied the will of intolerant laws and unreasonable restrictions in its struggle for the freedom to believe as their conscience dictated.

But for a few moments, let us consider what it would be like if we all found out our faith was once again, illegal, and that to profess our Unitarian beliefs might land us in jail, or with a heavy fine. How would we respond? Would we fight for our liberty? How important is our Unitarian and Free Christian faith? What would we do to defend it?

Currently, in what sometimes seems a climate of religious intolerance, it can be hard to reconcile ourselves to desiring religious liberty for those who use that liberty to injure others. It can hard to reconcile that civil liberty be given to those who seek to injure members of faiths not their own. It can be hard to

reconcile that civil liberty should be given to those who promote hatred in their political manifestos.

But is this actually what the old and revered toast was and is seeking?

Of course not. When we raise our glasses, as we will in a few moments, it will be in spite of the ongoing refusal to allow liberty by those who value their own beliefs and ideals above those of others. We will raise our glass as part of the ongoing struggle to bring peace and acceptance to our troubled world. We will raise our glass as a defiant pledge to rise above the petty squabbles of our modern world and declare our continued intent to hope for, pray for, work for, a world that is imbued with the ideals of those who first formed this Movement, this religious denomination, that even we cannot quite decide what to call ourselves, so seek to embrace the whole spectrum and call it both Unitarian and Free Christian. I believe they mean the same thing, one God, with roots in the Christianity of our forebears, and our hearts and minds opened to the wonder and wisdom of the world that redefines what 'God' means for all those who seek to understand. When, in a moment, we rise to offer this toast, may it mean more than an echo of our past. Let it mean that we hold in our hearts all those who suffer beneath unjust civil and religious laws that their suffering may cease. Let us hold in our hearts all those who impose unjust civil and religious laws; let us hold in our hearts all those who strive for peace in our world which can only come when in truth our desire for civil and religious liberty the world over has come to pass and may our hearts be open, that we too might not forget that in our lives our goal must be to strive for the rights of all persons to civil and religious liberty.

And so friends, I ask you to stand and raise your glasses, to 'Civil and Religious Liberty for all, the world over.' **Celia Cartwright**

Wolverhampton Sunday School 1959-72

When I was a child there was no Sunday School at Wolverhampton. I was the only child in the congregation and amused myself by drawing cats and dogs, which I handed out to church members after the evening service. My mother kept some of them in a tiny wallet. One of them, drawn when I was four, was called Conker Blancmange. I must have needed help with the spelling!

The Sunday School had been closed during the Second World War, and so, in 1959 when I was sixteen, a group of us decided to start a new one. Bill Wright, Denise Taverner, Keith Stevenson and I met in the vestry at the Church to plan it, getting used to meeting together in readiness for when children arrived.

In August 1959 Bill, Keith and I enrolled on a Sunday School Course held at Passfield Hall near Euston, organised by Rev Dudley Richards, the Religious Education and Youth Officer for the General Assembly. He was more than surprised to see us, because up to that point he was unaware that a Sunday School at Wolverhampton Church existed. We told him that we had teachers, but no children, but that we were working on it.

We returned from London with books to help us prepare lessons. Our first pupil was Keith Stephenson's cousin, Audrey Laws (no relation to me) and we were away! Bill Wright arrived one morning with some children who had been playing together in the West Park. It seemed a bit like the Pied Piper. They became regular members. Numbers swelled. We gained another teacher, Anne Mohammed, who brought her son, Amanat, and in October 1961 we were joined by my very good friend, Vicky Griffiths.

Each time we gained a new pupil we celebrated the fact at the local Pub, The Combermere. Don't imagine that we kept this up. It was just at the beginning when we were excited and triumphant.

We started to promote it. We designed a large chart divided into squares, headed, "Bring a friend and score a point." and as the children brought their friends, we recorded their names in a square on the chart. The pupil who brought the most friends was awarded a prize (no, not a car, but a *Golden Treasury of the Bible*).

We had no tradition and wanted to avoid having traditions from elsewhere imposed upon us; for instance, children dressed in white standing on platforms singing anthems at the Anniversary. Instead we showcased the work we had achieved during the year, displayed for visitors to see. Our first Anniversary Service in May 1963 was conducted by Rev Dudley Richards.

We lost the battle over tradition when one of our Ministers, Rev Maurice Bonner and his wife May, decided to introduce the Flower Queen ceremony which they had used at another church and, against my wishes, imposed it on our Sunday school. However, all was not lost, because the congregation seemed to enjoy it. A Queen and her retinue were chosen, and the Queen was given some responsibilities at church. My particular dislike for it was that the Queen and her retinue turned to left and right curtsying to the congregation several times as they processed up the aisle, which I found servile, and told them so. However, the good thing was that it led to our being involved in the Festival of Queens, which took place each year at the Civic Hall in Wolverhampton to raise money for the National Children's Homes. In each case the Queen and church would be announced,

and she and her retinue would hand in their financial contribution and take their place on the platform with hundreds of others. I was involved in this as secretary to the organiser of this event each year. Wolverhampton Sunday School took part on at least two occasions: our first Queens were Lorraine and Jennifer.

It is difficult to remember at what point the children arrived and left Sunday School. About 40 children came and went, as did the teachers, and finally Vicky and I were the only ones left. The children were from the local area. Their families had no connection with the church.

Since we are talking about the 1960s, I have forgotten a few of their surnames, so have inserted question marks in place of them. The children came in ones and twos and sometimes whole families. They were as follows: Lorraine Cullis (one of the Queens), Keith Cullis, Sharon Boyce, David Boyce, Elaine Nicholls,, Lynn Nicholls, Susan Balogh, Agnes Balogh, Richard Heath, Paul Heath, Elizabeth Heath, Arran Chopra Anil Chopra, Kamlesh Kaur, Susan Hookey, Rose Hookey, David Charles (sadly died), Cindy ?, Susan Coldron, Carol Russell, Anne Clayton, Anne's sister and three others from the family, Amanat Mohammed, Audrey Laws, Audrey's cousin Susan, Cynthia Bonner, Jennifer (the other Queen), Lynne Bolderson, Richard ?, two brothers (Michael and Fred ? , Ranjana ?, Ian Graham.

Two sisters, Rose and Susan Hookey, came each week, holding hands, bonded together. They never spoke. We thought that there was a physical problem, but we discovered years later that they were able to speak. One Sunday morning one of the boys set fire to papers in the waste-paper basket in the vestry. But for the presence of mind of Audrey Laws, who picked the basket up and

threw the contents outside, there might not be a building in existence now.

Over the years we took part sports days usually held at the Royal School for Deaf Children in Edgbaston because the head teacher Arnold Kay was a member of what was then the Church of the Messiah, the forerunner of Unitarian New Meeting Birmingham. All the Midland Sunday schools competed. Whatever happened to the Sports Shield awarded to the Sunday school with most points? Kingswood Sunday School was our biggest rival, with Wolverhampton as runners up most years until 1964 when we were placed first. We were similarly involved in the Music and Speaking Festival held at different churches each year and collected a large number of certificates. We travelled to Birmingham, Kingswood, Oldbury, West Bromwich and others. In 1964 we were pipped to the post by Kingswood who gained forty-six points to our forty-three.

Over the years we canvassed nearby flats, held jumble sales to raise funds, (amount in 1963 was £11. 15 s. 0d.); arranged pantomime visits, (one little boy went right to the front of the theatre and stood in front of other theatre-goers until we retrieved him). We sang carols at an Old People's Home – The Poplars – at New Cross Hospital.

The children thought the vestry, (our meeting place) was dull and uninteresting, and asked the church committee for permission to decorate it and brighten it up. Brave souls that they were, they approved the project, and left the young people to choose the colour scheme. Was this a big mistake? Purple, mauve and white for a vestry! More appropriate for a boudoir? However, it kept the

young people busy and enthusiastic for many evenings, helped by one of our Ministers, Rev John Mather.

One of our Sunday school members, Susan Balogh, was a bit of a Victoria Wood and wrote sketches which the group duly performed. An invitation was given to the congregation to join them for an evening of fun and refreshments. The children provided the food, probably with the help of some of the adults. It was quite an amazing evening, thoroughly enjoyed by the congregation.

Sometime in the 1970s the children felt that the name Sunday School was a handicap to its development. We all discussed what we should call it and settled on "The Sunday Group". At the same time Vicky and I decided to take a back seat and handed the organisation over to the young people themselves. The youngest, at nine years old, became the Librarian and the others found suitable jobs. They enjoyed their new-found responsibilities and made changes as and when needed.

In 1972 I left the area to train for the ministry at Manchester College Oxford. During that time I received a letter from them to tell me that they were closing this Sunday Group. By this time they were aged about 17 and 18. They had left school and there was nothing to hold them together any longer. I did keep in touch with some of them. One of them, Susan Balogh, took me out to lunch. She was now working, and I was a student!

Vicky met Lorraine Cullis, another former pupil on the bus. She now has two children of her own and two grandchildren and she spoke very warmly and enthusiastically about Sunday school days; she and her friend, Sharon Boyce, always looked forward to

Sunday school. She remembers that the Sunday school came to my home for tea. She and all the others are now about 65 years of age.

Carol Thomas (then Carol Russell) particularly remembers singing, *Glad that I live am I*. The words have stayed with her and have had relevance over the years. She also recalls that Easter was an occasion when she and her brother Jon had new clothes and were photographed in their Sunday best.

Over the years I have met several of the children in their working lives. Thirty years or more ago I met Sharon Boyce who was working as Head of Department at Beatties, a leading Department store in Wolverhampton.

I went into a boutique in Wolverhampton in the 1970s and was pleased and surprised to see Anne Clayton who had been in Sunday School. She was then assistant manager and introduced me to her manager as, “this is Penny Laws, my Sunday school teacher.” Naturally, I made a purchase before leaving the shop.

I was delighted to conduct the wedding service of Carol Russell and Philip Thomas in 1975. This was my first wedding, while still a student for the Ministry, a year before I became a Minister.

If we have helped to widen these young people’s perspectives in their formative years and have made a difference to their development in so doing, then we are indeed in a very privileged position.

Penny Johnson and Vicky Griffiths

District Round-up

Oldbury Rose Service

A celebration of summer in readings, hymns and prayer.

The 2nd July may be the centre of the year, but for us, Oldbury@Dudley the turn of the year is marked by the OLDBURY ROSE SERVICE which is held on July’s first Sunday. This year we were fortunate enough to have our District Minister, Rev Sue Woolley, to lead our service.

Pam Rose (Oldbury@Dudley) had devised nose-gays of roses for the ladies and button-holes of carnations for the men, as well as various displays of roses. From these, Sue chose six roses of different colours and one rose leaf; these she placed in a row along the lectern.

After the chalice-candle lighting and opening prayer, Sue began her service by saying that The Rose, as a flower, spoke to her of Beauty. In the Language of Roses all words were desirable attributes – the Multiflora Rose spoke of Grace and the Deep Pink of Gratitude. The Red Rose just had to be Love, while the delicate Lavender Rose breathed Enchantment and Awe. Desire and Longing were epitomised by the Coral Rose and when the Red Rose joined the White we had Unity. Hope was symbolised by the Rose leaf, which will often cling on when the roses have faded.

For each Rose, Sue had found not only an appropriate reading, but an appropriate prayer and hymn as well. This kept our gallant organist David Mearman (Stourbridge) busy, and the interlude music followed the theme, being MacDowell’s *To A Wild Rose*. A

great deal of hard work had gone into the preparation of this Service – but, thank you, Sue – it was well worth it.

The Service was much enjoyed by our visitors, too. Rev Penny Johnson and her husband, Ken, had come from Macclesfield to join us and Gavin Lloyd had travelled from Oxford. Penny started her calling as a minister here in the Midlands and never needs much persuading to return to the area she knows well.

We ended the afternoon with our usual ‘communion’ of tea and cakes, feeling that ‘a good time had been enjoyed by all. £70 was raised by this event, which will go to “Sophie’s Gifts” a charity in Kenya run by a longstanding friend of the Rose family.

Barbara Russell

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### **The Ration Challenge**

This Refugee Week (16-23 June), alongside Rev Mark Hutchinson and Helen Parsons (Cirencester), I participated in the Ration Challenge, living on refugee rations for seven days. The Challenge aims to simultaneously raise money for Concern Worldwide UK and awareness of the refugee experience.

According to the UNHCR (The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), 5.6 million of the estimated 68.5 million refugees worldwide are from Syria. The packs emulate those given to Syrian refugees.

They contain:

- 1.92 kg rice
- 170 g lentils
- 85 g dried chickpeas
- 120 g tinned sardines
- 330 ml vegetable oil

- 400 g tin of kidney beans
- 400 g plain flour

That's enough for a person to survive, not thrive – no fresh vegetables, little protein, and fewer daily calories than the recommended amount.

Throughout the week, I got used to being lethargic and hungry, and to drinking lots of water to try and make up for this. But the psychological, rather than physical, effects were unexpected. I had to continually remind myself that I wasn't ill (the food's plainness and consistency was similar to a recovering invalid's...). I also felt infantilised – there was no salt, no tomato paste, no garlic or flavourings that could transform the food into an adult's meal. This might sound trivial, but it was extremely wearying even for a week, let alone for the many years that refugees often survive on the packs. Food is also intimately connected with culture, identity and belonging; being unable to cook and eat familiar dishes in a place that is not home at all must make things worse. Though life-sustaining, the rations don't nourish a person's dignity and self-worth.

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Thank you to everyone who has helped us to raise nearly £1000 so far! This will provide food, medicine and education for Syrian refugees; and support Concern Worldwide UK in tackling hunger and extreme poverty amongst the world's most vulnerable people.

**Camila Garcés-Bovett** (*who also took the photo*)

*As Camila mentions above, those who participated in the challenge were sent a pack of rations for the week. This is a photo of the contents of Camila's pack. Could **you** live on that for a week?*



(from Cotswold Group Newsletter)

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Malvern Transformers Group

Rev Mark Hutchinson (Cotswold Group) reports that we now have a children's group in Malvern, supported by Evesham Chapel. It is run by Andrew and Rosemary Webb (who are now regular attenders at Oat Street). Transformers is an after-school children's group, currently catering for children of school-age to end of year.



Below is part of the group's mission statement:

Transformers is about making a difference in a small, or big, way.

Transforming Ourselves

Searching for truth and meaning. Recognising the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

Transforming Others

Striving for justice, equity and compassion in human relations. Accepting others and providing encouragement to spiritual growth.

Transforming the World

Working for peace. Caring for our world. Respecting the interdependent web of all existence.

Mark Hutchinson (*Photo by Andrew Webb*) (from Cotswold Group newsletter)

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## Oat Street Saturdays

During the Oat Street Saturday on 13<sup>th</sup> July, we at Oat Street remembered the comment by our former minister, Rob Whiteman: "That long path down to the Chapel is a real psychological deterrent to any first time potential visitor."

At our request, our current minister, Rev Mark Hutchinson, agreed to try bringing our Chapel closer to any first-time potential visitor. We set up a small table with some Unitarian literature on our own premises under the entrance archway to the Gatehouse, and Mark took up post.

The proximity of Mark and his material to the street gave any passer by the chance to stop and have a chat or to have a discreet

passing-by glance without any commitment. As a result, an old gentleman felt moved to have a look at the chapel garden which he had not seen since he was a boy, and three additional people came to our Sunday service the next day. We feel this little stall has the potential to reach people who might not come across us on the Internet.

We are happy to report on the continued success of this initiative. It consists of our chapel being open between 10 am and 1 pm on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturdays during the weekends he is with Oat Street Chapel in Evesham.

It breaks down roughly into two parts. Between 10 and 11.30, the chapel is just open for any member or visitor passing by to come and have a look round, have a cup of tea, or just sit quietly. We have had several visitors and a Gatehouse booking as a result. Then from 11.30 to 12.30, Mark conducts an alternative service and meditation for anyone who is in the chapel. This includes readings and/or singing one or two hymns from *Sing Your Faith*, taking part in readings from *Stirrings 2018*, listening to the most wonderful, soothing music, considering passages from *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran and from the Sufi poet, Hafiz, and ending with a period of shared silence.

It is a perfect spiritual experience conducted in the sacred space of our chapel with its wonderful stained glass windows and beautiful flower arrangements, the latter by our florist, Sally Attwood. All our participants and other visitors to the chapel on these Saturday mornings also have the opportunity to spend time in our glorious garden, which continues to be well-maintained by Chris Grove and Barrie Wheeler.

**Lesley Harris** (and from Cotswold Group Newsletter)

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Extinction Rebellion in Evesham

Tell the Truth. This is the first demand of Extinction Rebellion (XR), demanding that the government tell the truth.

The truth is that the current system is committing ecocide (the destruction of the environment, particularly when it is deliberate) on a routine basis. Moreover, this destruction is having disproportionate effects on, broadly speaking the global south and the global less-well-off. Jesus the rebel was very clear in the need to tell the truth to the people in power, as well as inviting them to tell the truth.

It is possible to see Extinction Rebellion simply in terms of the big publicity protests such as April in London and July in various cities. Yet the need to raise awareness has led to multiple groups around the country, including now Evesham, gathering fortnightly to work together on a series of endeavours to protect our planet and thus humanity.

How does an Extinction Rebellion meeting work? A meeting typically lasts 90 minutes. There is always a check-in process to allow each individual to be present with whatever is going on for them at that time. This is particularly important for the intense feelings that the whole process of the climate crisis can generate in people.

The Evesham group have started a monthly stall on the High Street, and so updates and rosters are discussed and planned. This is aimed at a general awareness-raising to inform people of why we are doing what we are doing.

We then have an open forum on local actions we think the group might take. Our emphasis is on how our actions can add to the

already great work done by many local people. Also, how we can apply pressure to local politicians of all varieties to declare a climate emergency and implement appropriate responses.

Reflection is a really important part of the DNA of Extinction Rebellion and a regular slot will allow all voices to express opinions on current or foreseen action. There is a difficult balance to draw between action and disruption, causing delays in sometimes critical circumstances. At the time of writing, there have been intense discussions around activities that blocked the M32 in Bristol. Extinction Rebellion are always mindful and sad at the disruption that is caused, but also clear that the disruption to our planet is something that can only be addressed in time with these forms of direct action.

The last thirty years of other protests and political actions have failed. Martin Luther King Jr and Gandhi understood this too. The potential unequal collapse of world order due to climate change has to be a crisis to protest about.

A faith-based response Every call to respond to injustice in the world requires reflection from those of faith. The climate crisis is no exception. Perhaps, in fact, it is the exception. It is one issue that unites those of faith and no faith: the need to protect that which was Universe- or God-given, depending on your perspective.

Whatever that is, try an XR meeting or gather in community to address any local or world issues that this crisis demands. You might just find that a boost in awareness by XR helps local groups to achieve more.

Extinction Rebellion meet every second Friday at 7 pm at Oat Street Unitarian Chapel. **Rev Mark Hutchinson**

Aleks Zglinska joins Northampton Unitarians

We are delighted to report that Aleks Zglinska, who recently moved to Wellingborough, has taken up the quarter-time role of Community Development Coordinator, starting on 1st September. Aleks will be well known to many through her sterling work for Kidderminster Unitarians, and is also a member of the MUA Executive Committee. She will be leading one service a month, on 3rd Sunday, from January 2020 (our pulpit supply for 2019 already being arranged), and taking responsibility for the building and outreach. She has already made a difference by suggesting that we move our services to 11.00 am, rather than 10.30 am. The service is now preceded by refreshments and chat. The new service time will be implemented from 1st October.



Sue Woolley

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## Integrity

Integrity – what we hoped for in specifically shaped samples of fabric, stretched (at noted room temperature) on a calibrated vice,

immersed in dry ice, stretched again, allowed to return to room temperature and tested against its original shape. Then heated, cooled and tested. If after all this, the fabric's shape was EXACTLY the same, the make-up was properly integrated, so I could tick and sign the box marked "Integrity".

But I felt fairly sure that my long-ago workaday world was not going to be of great interest to anyone, so there must be something about the word I'm missing. I must have read it at some time but it had not registered. I therefore turned to the dictionary. My goodness, trying to find the word! It came right at the end of the entry for 'Integer', lots of maths and engineering and industry – then, last entry – integrity – "the unimpaired state of anything; honesty; purity."

"The unimpaired state" sounds very much like that for which we are all striving. Or should be, I suppose! The giving-up of the seven deadly you-know-whats. I think, though, integrity is better served by seeking to integrate, in our lives, the seven virtues; Kindness, in thought as well as deed, and I feel charity should be the result of that virtue. Diligence and Patience seem to belong together, since it is Impatience that often leads to lack of diligence. Chastity and temperance are very personal virtues, more, to my mind, of moral value than virtues. Humility I know nothing whatever about.

I said earlier on, that my workaday world was not important – I've changed my mind!

We are so much like those samples of fabric. We all get stretched at some time or other. And get hot and bothered about jobs that prove to take longer than we thought, at time that rushes past like an express train, at gadgets that decide not to work when we want them. Cold with anxiety, fear and sometimes with anger. This is

when we need to re-integrate – to get back to our unimpaired state, back to the template of oneness with our real self. This is when we need integrity-honesty, asking ourselves 'are any of the problems of our own making?' If they are-let us learn to deal with them. If not – pray. Remember... God is the one Power whose integrity is never in doubt.

### Barbara Russell

*Barbara also contributed some worship material on this theme...*

**Chalice Candle lighting:** This Candle lights easily – the wax and the wick are well integrated; the match flares when struck on the sandpaper –because the match-head and sandpaper ain't!

### Opening Prayer:

Almighty Father, whose integrity is beyond reproach, I ask your help in making my life as free from falsehood as it is possible in human life. May I bend the truth only when the telling of it would wound. Teach me to keep a still tongue and think before I speak.

Keep my slippery feet firmly on the path you would have me follow, that at all times I try to be the person I want to be rather than the person I am. Amen

**For a Service on Integrity, I cannot do better, for my opening words,** than quote, from Shakespeare's Hamlet, Polonius's words to Hamlet "This, above all, to thine own self be true; it follows then, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

### Prayer of Thanks

Almighty God, we have much to thank you for; for the mundane things, our creature comforts of security, of food and drink, light



and warmth, for the many services rendered to us by unknowns and that we never appreciate until they fail.

We thank you for the beauty of the natural world around us, a world that can frighten us with its power or sooth us with its serenity.

We thank you for doctors who look after our bodies and for your ministers who look after our souls.

For those who bring knowledge in science and technology and pleasure in arts and music.

And we offer our gratitude for intangible blessings – the love and comradeship of family and friends, those who give support in our bad times and share our good times and make them even better.

We thank you, Lord, for your presence in our lives; the presence that enhances all our pleasures; sweetens our bitterness and deals patiently with our anxieties and fears. By your grace may we receive forgiveness for our failings and renewal of strength for our weakness. By your power may we do with delight the tasks your wisdom has set before and remember that always you have us in your care.

Amen

### **Prayer for others**

Dear Father God, we would bring before your love and mercy all people who are less fortunate than we are.

For those that are sick in body, we ask your compassion and your healing; for those sick in mind, the worried, the stressed, we ask the serenity of your peace.

Help us to remember the forgotten, the neglected. Forgive our indifference and strengthen within us the love we should have for our fellows.

Grant us the grace not to resent those who come to this land to escape horrors in their own. Let us not judge too quickly or too harshly, but rather be thankful that we have no need to flee,

Open our minds and our hearts to the needs of others; teach us that help is worship when it is done with willingness and love.

We bring before you the victims of war, whatever their nationality. We can no longer claim ignorance of the violence of warfare and we must not. Rather we would pray unceasingly that you take the glory from war and open our eyes to its violation of all things holy.

We pray for all that is right with this world; for those who dedicate their lives to the well-being of others; to all that care and put that caring into action we ask your power and compassion. AMEN

### **Closing Words and Benediction:**

One is a magic number, for it is indivisible. I am one among many millions, yet I cherish my oneness

But I need to take care – that oneness must not turn into “selfishness”.

I can offer that oneness to the one Power we call God, and receive many blessings, each tuned to the needs and capabilities my oneness.

There has been but one perfect Man, Jesus, whom we call our Brother and whose teachings tell us of the one quality we all need – love.

You are not just a congregation – but a gathering of individuals, each with your own oneness. For each one of you I ask God’s blessing, for God alone knows each facet of your being. AMEN

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Integrity in Choosing Charities

Integrity means honesty, probity, uprightness – I wonder whether we carry these attributes into choosing which charities we support?

I think we should research the charities to which we want to donate to assess their background and how they are run. This has been called “Effective Altruism” and is a social movement which I leave you to read up about. www.effectivealtruism.org I want to outline some ideas about choosing charities.

In general, when money is raised there is a need to find something compelling with which to hit potential donors. Think of Comic Relief. To get people to contribute the Heart must overcome the Head. Tears and laughter encourage giving – so we contribute. This is the ethos for many “begging” charities”, but where does our money actually go? How much reaches the advertised recipients? Is their work worthwhile?

One category that concerns me is “Orphanages” particularly in third world countries. These are often not genuine orphanages and the children have been brought there with promises to their parents of a better life, education and training. Is splitting up families ‘good’ for the children? Many “Orphanages” have been established as fronts to acquire funds from foreign aid, and the children are often exploited. I refer you to websites: www.homecomingproject.org and www.rethinkorphanages.org (and there are others).

Then there are foundations set up by the likes of Andrew Carnegie, the Scottish philanthropist who decided to give away all his wealth during his lifetime. Laudable, I agree, but he decided what area was going to provide the greatest good to the greatest

number of people, choosing education in the form of libraries and concert halls. The people were not given any say in the matter! The same model is used today by John Wood in “Room to Read”; by “Tencent Holdings” (a Chinese enterprise); and by the Tata Steel family who give two-thirds of their profit back to the people – but all these donors decide what is good for the recipients. Actually, the Tata company also audits a Social Impact Investment policy alongside their profit and loss accounts – but I wish the recipients had a say in what is provided!

There is one charity which actually consults possible recipients on their needs. This is based on the idea of E F Schumacher: “Small is Beautiful”. He said, “Find out what the people are doing and help them to do it better”. What happens is a community will request help to develop a project; then engineers, agriculturalists etc in this country will look at the problem and develop a technology which will provide solutions. This is then fed back, making sure the community is involved, using local resources and materials, training the locals in techniques to implement the technology and how to maintain it long-term. The community takes ownership. Schumacher said, “The best aid to give is intellectual aid, a gift of useful knowledge.....infinitely preferable to a gift of material things.” See www.practicalaction.org

There is one other point to remember: each of us donates through taxes – 0.7% of GDP goes to aid. The Government has set up the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) whose work is to scrutinise UK aid spending and try to ensure it is used effectively, and delivers value for UK tax payers. The UK commits to transparency and accountability, but the problem is that records from recipient countries are often falsified e.g. if Human Rights are involved. ICAI: www.icaei.independent.gov.uk

Nations become reliant on aid long term: locals don't pay taxes and exploitation results. It undermines democracy and increases corruption. Getting hand-outs becomes a way of life and not receiving them puts a family at a disadvantage regarding paying for school fees or healthcare. Corruption is seen as a privilege and refusing money is seen as disrespectful to the family because they lose the monetary support. So – how should we regard the aid programme, and could we influence it anyway? I hope some of it reaches those really in need of help.....

One other aspect of supporting charities is the very grey area of "Voluntourism". This is when tourists go to volunteer in orphanages or disaster areas, often paying large sums for the 'privilege'. It may also involve Gap Year students. There is a debate online as to whether western 'do-gooders' actually do harm by arriving for a short stay and then leaving behind disappointed children or unfinished buildings etc. This is addressed among others by "Re Think Orphanages" and "The truth about Volunteerism". (I leave you to look them up.)

And when we volunteer for charitable work in this country (or abroad) do we always take note of the charity's Safeguarding Policy; or its long term viability? Remember The Kids' Club? And what about the negative stories about OXFAM?

Researching the charity we would support and weighing up its ethos against our values is how I see Integrity playing a part in our Charitable giving – whether work/time, or monetary donations. Do you know enough about your chosen charities?

Alison Thursfield

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## Just Do It!

The slogan of a certain sportswear company is "Just Do It". Simple and brilliant. I have always understood it in the context of pushing through physical pain to achieve a certain sporting goal.

This morning, I came across a rather different take on the "Just Do It" message, by none other than Mother Teresa:

"People are often unreasonable and self-centred. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are honest, people may cheat you. Be honest anyway.

If you find happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough.

Give your best anyway.

For you see, in the end, it is between you and God.

It was never between you and them anyway."



This is another kind of challenge altogether. It is a challenge to have integrity; to live our lives with authenticity. Because it is the only way we're going to grow, in any way that matters, in the long run.

What a wonderful set of commandments: Forgive, Be Kind, Be Honest, Be Happy, Do Good, Give Your Best. Nothing in there about Get On, Get Ahead, Look After Number One. These are the commandments of our secular society.

I think I'd rather give Mother Teresa's a try, and Just Do Them.

**Sue Woolley**

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"If you want to influence others, the most important thing you can do is be a living example of the principles, ideals, and faith that you advocate."

Nick Vujicic

"Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody's going to know whether you did it or not."

Oprah Winfrey

"It takes courage to create a meaningful life of integrity. It also requires good company. And practice."

Shelly Francis

MUA Congregations: Times of Services

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
Kidderminster	New Meeting House	11.00 am
Kingswood	Meeting House	11.00 am
Shrewsbury	Unitarian Church	10.30 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

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SEEKER SEEKING SEEKERS

You may have read that I am a qualified Spiritual Director. Unlike therapy, spiritual direction is not necessarily centred around a problem, although it could be. Often it begins with a desire to grow - to move beyond the place where one is to a deeper, richer place.

Spirituality is not a distinct area of life, but a dimension of all life. God is not present to us only when we pray; nor is spiritual growth confined to such times. Therefore, spiritual direction is not just focused on the obvious aspects of a spiritual life: prayer, religious vocation, temptations, delusions, and other such things.

Since there is no area of human life where God is uninterested...no corner of it in which the Holy Mystery is not present...no aspect of life is inappropriate to bring to spiritual direction. **God is the deepest dimension in all areas of human life:** thus, all areas are open to spiritual direction.

So if you are interested in going deeper on your spiritual journey, please get in touch. (details on page 3).

Sue Woolley, District Minister



The Winter 2019/20 issue will be published in January

**Please may we have your contributions on local matters,
& on the theme of "Simplicity"**

by Friday 4th January 2020

Thank you!