

MU NOW



THE MAGAZINE OF
THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN
ASSOCIATION

ISSUE 59

SPRING 2020

www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk

MU Now issue 59

In this issue:

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| From the Editor | 3 |
| The President's Piece | 4 |
| MUA District Minister Spring Update | 6 |
| MUA Executive Committee Key Messages | 7 |
| MUA Executive Committee Aims and Objectives | 7 |
| <i>Radical Spirits</i> by David Taylor | 8 |
| <i>Two Australian Unitarian Universalist congregations</i> Gavin Lloyd | 17 |
| <i>Good News Litany</i> by John Corrado, shared by Peter Godfrey | 18 |
| Book Reviews | 20 |
| <i>The Oberammergau Passion Play</i> by Diane Rutter | 23 |
| Offer of IT Support | 26 |
| District Round-up | 27 |
| Awakening | 39 |
| MUA Congregations: Contact Details | 46 |
| Advertisement for Spiritual Direction | 47 |

From the Editor

Welcome to the Spring 2020 issue of *MU Now*. Being in lockdown has obviously set the creative juices flowing; this is a bumper issue, including fascinating articles by David Taylor, Gavin Lloyd, Peter Godfrey and Diane Rutter...

As well as some inspirational stories of how we are managing to stay in touch during this COVID-19 lockdown, in the *District Round-up*, and several contributions on the theme of Awakening.

Huge 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 "Spirit" and the deadline for submissions will be **Friday 4th September 2020**.

In the meantime, I wish each member of all our congregations every blessing, and hope it will not be too long before we can meet again, in person. I will be holding you all in my thoughts and prayers.

Sue Woolley

President's Piece



In many ways, not much has changed for me over the last few weeks even as the world outside has changed. I'm still working full-time every weekday, with much the same workload. I'm working from home now rather than travelling to the office in Birmingham, but the team I manage are located across the country, so we've always kept in touch remotely. At home, we already had our shopping delivered from the supermarket once a week, used the internet for most of our other shopping, and most weeks the furthest we travelled is to the park at the end of the road. So not much has changed.

And yet, everything is different. Infrequent visits to family living 100 miles away have been replaced by weekly video conference calls. The street is noisy with clapping at 8 o'clock on a Thursday evening. Everyone avoids me, and each other, very carefully if they need to pass in the street. Heading to a local shop the floor is taped with 2m markings. As I write this at my desk looking out onto the street very few cars come past, and the main movement is the branches of the trees in the breeze. And I have learned, sadly too well, that the news that someone is heading to the hospital with breathing difficulties does not always end in recovery. Everything is indeed different.

Times of crisis test our institutions. My beloved church congregation exists mainly on WhatsApp and Zoom, and through the various phone conversations. We do our practical committee business by e-mail rather than in the margins of the coffee hour. It is not the same as it normally is, but it is still there. I have access to more worship from more places than I have ever had before. The way in which our movement's ministers and lay people have risen to the challenge of keeping the chalice flame alight in the

Midlands and across the country (and not just on the internet) has impressed me so much. Congregations and individuals are coming together in new ways and many people are finding that being together in our hearts is possible even if we cannot be together in person.

Sometimes this spring I feel that I have not yet awakened from a pretty lousy dream. Or that 2020 is a write off. A non-year. Fast forward to 2021, or rewind and start again. And yet. The sun still rises in the morning, the sky is still blue, the plants still grow, the wind still blows, the people are still there connecting despite the social distancing, the love is still with me wherever I stay. This year is not what I expected it would be but there is still good in it and I am very much pleased to be alive here and now.

The last worship I led before church services were stopped was about Julian of Norwich. She lived through the tumultuous 14th century with its revolts and the Black Death. And it was after those experiences, that she wrote that “All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well”.

I look forward very much to the time that we shall be able to un-cocoon ourselves and embrace our Unitarian communities in person. Until then, I hope you can find some enjoyment in the awakening of spring from the safe distance of your homes, and that all shall be well.

Angela Maher

~~~~~

“It is spring again. The earth is like a child that knows poems by heart.”

— **Rainer Maria Rilke**

## **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:** I carried on leading worship until 1<sup>st</sup> March (it so happened that the next two Sundays were free). Since lockdown, I have been producing an online service for the District, which has been posted around by e-mail and also on the MUA website. 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 the topic of *Ideas for Running a Thriving Congregation*, with Laura Dobson, Andy Phillips and Diane Rutter, sadly had to be cancelled. I hope we will be able to run it another time.

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

I am a fully qualified **spiritual director**. I offer direction sessions, on a one-to-one basis. Please contact me if you are interested. Please see advert on p. 46 for further information. **And if you are feeling alone and down, please feel free to give me a call on 01604 870746...**

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

~~~~~

MUA Executive Committee Key Messages

The Key Messages below, from our November and January 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. 2020 AGM: the Annual Report and Accounts were approved at the January meeting, and the AGM was held via e-mail on Saturday 28th March.

We will be having our first Zoom committee meeting at the end of May.

Angela Maher: tel: 0777-9113-175; angela.j.maher@gmail.com

Sue Woolley: tel: 01604-870746; revsuewoolley@gmail.com

~~~~~

## MUA Executive Committee Aims & Objectives

At our Special Committee Day last June, the MUA Executive Committee formulated four aims and objectives, by which we measure how well we are doing our work. They are as follows:

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

~~~~~

I am grateful to **David Taylor** of Stourbridge for submitting the following fascinating and scholarly article, which will give us much food for thought...

Radical Spirits

Or What have Unitarians ever done for us?

A few miles from where I live is Chapel House Lane, Cradley. The road is named after the house and small chapel connected to it, which was owned by Joseph Priestley's second son, also called Joseph (Haden, 1988). So, our Unitarian history is all around us in ways we may not even recognise!

Priestley senior is, of course, best known as a scientist, rationalist and Unitarian minister in Birmingham. In 1780 he gave a lecture to the Unitarian congregation in Dudley. Five years earlier, in 1775, the town was the birthplace of another Joseph, Joseph Cook. He went on to become a Methodist minister in the north of England. In 1806 he and his congregation were expelled from the Methodist church for their heretical beliefs. They had become Methodist Unitarians, and were known as Cookites (Smith, 2006). Their chief claim to fame is that at least half of the congregation went on to become the Rochdale Pioneers of Co-operation, today's modern Co-op movement and retail stores. (McLeod, 1984). That is something to think about the next time you find yourself queueing for a pint of milk!

The historical record seems to suggest that growth in Unitarian congregations hit something of a slump after 1790, suggesting that a small but dedicated core of believers were at the heart of social and political change (Gilbert, 1976). Unitarians have never shied from either religious or political reform. The philosopher John Locke, regarded as a Unitarian by many, created awareness that life, liberty and property were basic human entitlements and were not just for the privileged few.

The situation doesn't seem to have improved by the 1840s, because the Leicester Unitarian District Domestic Mission reported that, "...there is an almost universal neglect of public worship in those parts of the town that are occupied by the working classes". (Royle, 1971). As if in an attempt to analyse this problem, the Unitarian mission in Manchester divided the population into four groups: the indifferent, non-professing Christians, members of various Christian denominations, and unbelievers (Royle, 1971). Ask most people today what faith has got to do with politics, and they will probably say "nothing", or even that faith and politics should be kept well apart. Well, they would be wrong, on both points.

In 1884 Hubert Bland and his wife, the children's author Edith Nesbit, along with the Quaker Edward Peace and the Spiritualist Frank Podmore, founded The Fabian Society. The interest in social reform and justice propagated by the Society soon attracted the great and the good of the period, including the social reformer and women's suffrage campaigner Annie Beasant and the author George Bernard Shaw. They were soon joined by the economist and Unitarian minister Rev. Philip Wicksteed. He was minister at Upper Brooke Street Chapel in Sheffield. Here he was assisted by a new convert to Unitarianism, John Trevor. In 1877, when Trevor was twenty-two, his health and faith collapsed, and on a visit to America he discovered the ideas of Emerson. Upon recovery, he became a Unitarian and returned to England. While assisting Wicksteed he came into contact with Socialist ideas, and in October 1891 he set up the first Labour Church in Chorlton Town Hall in Manchester (Smith, 1993). It must be remembered that the political Labour Party that we know today wasn't founded until February 1900. Influenced by the ideas of John Ruskin and the Christian Socialist movement, Labour Churches attempted to appeal to the working classes with a mixture of politics and spiritual sustenance. These meetings became so

popular that by the second meeting the auditorium was packed, and hundreds were turned away (MacKenzie, 1979).

The influences of Unitarianism can clearly be seen in this new movement. One of its main principles was "That the religion of the Labour Movement is not sectarian or dogmatic, but a free religion, leaving each man free to develop his relations with the power that brought him into being". (Barnsby, 1998) Although short-lived and mainly active in the Midlands and North of England, the Labour Churches were an influence on the founding of the new Labour Party that we know today (Pelling, 1965).

This link between radical and political thought can best be seen in the London suburb of Newington Green and its Unitarian church. In 1758 Dr Richard Price arrived at the Green with his wife Sarah to become the new Unitarian minister. Soon his house became an important meeting place for progressive and radical thinkers. Americans such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were visitors, as was the philosopher David Hume, scientist and Unitarian Joseph Priestley, political agitator Thomas Paine and early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. In 1758 Price wrote a highly influential pamphlet which argued that individual conscience and reason should be used when making moral choices, and rejected the traditional Christian doctrines of original sin and moral punishment, something I am sure modern Unitarians would not argue with. But it wasn't just theological matters that occupied Price. In 1765 he was admitted into the Royal Society for his work on mathematics and probability. During his lifetime he established a considerable reputation as an authority on finance, economics and life insurance. His work can be considered the foundation stone on which the modern insurance market is founded. When the American War of Independence started in 1775, Price was a great supporter of its aims. So well regarded was Price that he was invited to go to America by the newly

formed Congress of the United States to organise the financial administration, but he declined.

In the 1780s the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, aged 25, arrived in Newington Green, and soon became friends with Price and a regular at his Sunday services. Mary is rightly regarded as the founder of the modern feminist movement, and of course she was also a Unitarian. Her campaign for female education, something we take for granted today, led her to write “Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience” (Wollstonecraft, 1988). Kathryn Gleadle, Professor of Gender and Women's History at Mansfield College, Oxford, has stated, “One of the most vital threads binding together the complex radical ideology of the early feminists was a close acquaintance with Unitarianism” (Gleadle, 1995).

Theodora Mills of Cheltenham was an active suffragist and Unitarian who was born in 1874. She became honorary secretary of the Cheltenham branch of the NUWSS (National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies) in 1902. Theodora put her energies in to organising deputations, events, marches, plays, speeches and songs to forward the cause of women's right to vote. It is likely she attended the June 1908 London demonstration and the suffrage “pilgrimage” to London in 1913. Throughout her life she wrote letters in the local paper on women's rights, vegetarianism and the Unitarian faith.

Unitarians have always had a deep concern for education. Because they were unable to subscribe to the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles of faith, they were unable to attend either Oxford or Cambridge Universities. Unitarians and other nonconformists who wished to have a higher education had to find their own alternatives. The first of these was Warrington Academy, where Joseph Priestley was once a tutor. It eventually

became the Manchester Academy and eventually moved to Oxford, where it was renamed Manchester College, Oxford. But it wasn't just higher education that concerned Unitarians. They wanted education for all. To achieve this, Unitarians pioneered the ‘ragged schools’, the first of which was founded in 1818 by John Pounds. And the best way to educate the public was to give them access to knowledge in the form of books.

In 1845 George Dawson became the minister of the Unitarian Church of the Saviour, erected for him by his supporters. It was in the pulpit that Dawson developed his concept of the Civic Gospel. He called upon his congregation to join him in the struggle “to improve conditions in the town and the quality of life enjoyed by its citizens”. Dawson also lectured on English literature at the Birmingham and Midland Institute and helped to found the Shakespeare Memorial Library in Birmingham.

In 1791 the Priestley Riots in Birmingham left a lasting mark on the city. With both the American and French Revolutions very much still in the air, Unitarians across the country were often associated with political radicalism. In June 1792, 600 copies of a letter from Thomas Paine to the government defending his cheap edition of his book, *The Rights of Man*, circulated in Birmingham via local Unitarians and radicals. Having had their places of worship razed to the ground, the two Unitarian meetings in Birmingham met together in a temporary building in Livery Street. The minister, Rev. William Belcher was arrested for selling *The Rights of Man* in December 1792. He defended himself by saying that the book was on sale in every bookshop in Birmingham. (Barnsby, 1990). For me, the following quote from Paine's *Rights of Man* neatly sums up the Unitarian approach to life and religion: “The World is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion” (Paine, 1984).

Staying in Birmingham, the Rev. Henry Crosskey, minister of the Unitarian Church of the Messiah, provided the driving force during the 1870s and 1880s aimed at securing the rights of women and securing their church as a centre of feminist activists. (Plant, 2000). He established 'Morning Lectures on Religion for Ladies'. The starting point for his feminist theology was the conviction that God displayed male and female attributes in equal parts. In 1877 he told a meeting of the Birmingham auxiliary of the Women's Suffrage Society that denying women the vote was "both injurious to the person excluded, and to the community at large". Society as a whole was in a state of unbalance without women's equal participation. His social reform ideas didn't stop with women's suffrage. In the 1840s, along with his wife Hannah, he joined The Anti-Corn League, in protest against the unfair tax on bread, which marked the beginning of their lifelong commitments to reform in the name of social and political justice. Prior to becoming the Minister at Birmingham, Crosskey had been a Unitarian Minister in Glasgow, where he became an admirer of the radical American anti-slavery campaigner and American Unitarian, William Lloyd Garrison.

The ideological debt which Crosskey owed to Unitarianism is apparent. One only has to look at the former Spiritualist and Unitarian minister Goodwyn Barmby, who had written in the 1840s of man-power and woman-power, two qualities which must exist in equal quantities for the perfect society.

John Goodwyn Barmby was a British Victorian utopian socialist. He and his wife Catherine were influential supporters of the social reformer Robert Owen in the late 1830s, before becoming active in Unitarianism in the 1840s. Both had established reputations as staunch feminists, and proposed the addition of women's suffrage to the demands of the Chartist movement, and they were also communitarians (Taylor, 1983).

Communitarianism refers to utopian socialists, and other idealists, who experimented with communal styles of living. Barmby founded a utopian community on the Channel Islands (Armytage, 1961) and at times corresponded with radicals including Friedrich Engels, who would later go on to work with Karl Marx on the *Communist Manifesto*.

Barmby is also acknowledged as the person who claimed to have introduced the word "communist" into the English language, as a translation from the French during a visit to Paris in 1840 and he introduced Engels to the French communist movement. Together they founded the London Communist Propaganda Society in 1841. By 1843, the Barmbys had recast their movement as a church.

One thing that distinguished Unitarians from other faith traditions was their reliance on science and rationalism to influence their faith. This concern for science and health led the Edinburgh Unitarian Thomas Southend Smith to champion the study of epidemics in the treatment of illness and the use of autopsies in the prevention and better understanding of the spread of illness.

The radicalism seemingly inherent in the north of England led, in 1809, to the formation of the Bible Christian Church. This was a Christian vegetarian sect founded by William Cowherd in Salford, Manchester. To join the church, members had to sign a pledge that committed them to a vegetarian diet and abstention from alcohol. Followers of Cowherd's ideas were commonly known as Bible Christians or "Cowherdites." Cowherd's beliefs are acknowledged as one of the corner stones to the formation of the modern Vegetarian Society which was founded in 1847. By the 1930s, Cowherd's congregation had dwindled, and the appointment of a new minister only stalled the inevitable end. Unable to find a minister from their own, small congregation,

they approached the theologically sympathetic Unitarian College at Warrington, who recommended Rev. P.C. Whiteman. But a year later, in 1932, it became obvious that terminal decline had set in, and so the church was closed and the remaining congregation transferred to the nearby Pendleton Unitarian Chapel (Antrobus, 1997).

I hope that I have shown that apart from social reform and justice, scientific discoveries, female and universal suffrage and education, that Unitarianism has had a subtle but surprisingly far reaching effect upon all our lives.

References

- Ackroyd, P**, 1995, 'Blake' (Minerva)
- Allardyce, A**, 2010, 'The Village that changed the world: A history of Newington Green, London N16' (Newington Green Action Group)
- Antrobus, D**, 1997, 'A Guiltless Feast: The Salford Bible Christian Church and the rise of the modern vegetarian movement' (City of Salford Education & Leisure)
- Armytage, W.H.G**, 1961, 'Heavens Below: Utopian Experiments in England 1560-1960' (Routledge, Kegan & Paul)
- Barnsby, G.J**, 1990, 'Birmingham Working People: A history of the Labour Movement in Birmingham 1650-1914' (Integrated Publishing Services)
- Barnsby, G.J**, 1998, 'Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country 1850-1939' (Integrated Publishing Services)
- Gilbert, A.D.**, 1976, 'Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914' (Longman)
- Gleadle, K**, 1995 'The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51' (Macmillan)

- Haden, J**, 1988, 'Street Names of Stourbridge & its Vicinity' (Dudley Teachers' Centre)
- Harrison, J.F.C.**, 1969, 'Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America' (Routledge, Kegan & Paul)
- Mackenzie, N & J**, 1979, 'The First Fabians' (Quartet Books)
- McLeod, H**, 1984, 'Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain' (Macmillan)
- Marshall, P, 1986, 'The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin' (Freedom Press)
- Paine, T**, 1984, 'Rights of Man' (Penguin)
- Pelling, H**, 1965, 'Origins of the Labour Party: 1880 – 1900' (OUP)
- Plant, H**, 2000 'Ye Are All One in Christ Jesus: Aspects of Unitarianism and Feminism in Birmingham c. 1869-90' (Women's History Review, Vol.9, No. 4 pp. 721-742)
- Royle, E**, 1971 'Radical Politics 1790-1900: Religion and Unbelief' (Longman)
- Smith, L**, 1993, 'Religion and the rise of Labour' (Keele University Press)
- Smith, L**, 2006, 'The Unitarians, A Short History' (Lensden Publishing)
- Tomalin, C**, 1985, 'The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft' (Penguin Books)
- Taylor, B**, 1983, 'Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century' (Pantheon Books)
- Wollstonecraft, M**, 1988, 'Vindication of the Rights of Woman' (Penguin)

I am grateful to Cressida Pryor for supplying information on Theodora Mills of Cheltenham. DT

~~~~~



## Two Australian Unitarian Universalist Congregations

Six years ago I wrote an article in these columns about my visit to a Unitarian Universalist Sunday service in Perth, Western Australia. I made a repeat visit some weeks ago during one of my periodic Australian holidays, and also visited the Adelaide congregation. It may be recalled that the style of the service in Perth is quite informal, and that the ‘worship space’ is a small but attractive hall in the suburbs, shared by other organisations. On this particular Sunday I arrived early, to be received warmly by members of the local branch of Alcoholics Anonymous at their ‘meeting slot’, and made a swift but discreet withdrawal. The AA disciples then withdrew, and made way for the morning service of the local Unitarian faithful.

The congregation in Perth consisted of some twenty two souls, a number inflated this time I think by the presence of the particular preacher. The latter turned out to be a young looking eighty one year old lady originally from Holland, who had entered a convent in her teens. She spoke about her harrowing experiences of sexual abuse at the hands of her father, her experiences of convent life, and, believe it or not, her life ‘on the game’ following her ‘escape’ from convent life in her thirties. After a talk of some twenty minutes there was a fervent question and answer session. The speaker felt that the Roman Catholic sacrament of confession seemed to give abusers absolution from their misdeeds only for them to err again and again. I tentatively asked if the renaming of this sacrament from ‘confession’ to ‘reconciliation’ was a step in the right direction, but was roundly met with the ‘plus ca change...’ argument. When I later told my brother Barrie about the service he remarked that I was lucky to escape alive! Anyway some of us went out for a pleasant lunch afterwards during which everyone spoke approvingly of the works of Karen Armstrong.

Later I was glad to attend St George’s Cathedral for a soothing evensong with only the words of the Magnificat to remind me of the morning’s proceedings.

The following Sunday I was in Adelaide, where I attended morning service at the purpose built modern UU church there. The congregation consisted of about forty souls. There were no hymn books. The words of hymns were displayed on a screen. The service was more formal, and there were candles of joy and concern. Happily the latter did not consist of the grinding of local axes. The sermon was preached by a local Roman Catholic Benedictine (and fellow ‘Pom’) who spoke about his work amongst the local homeless – and there was time for a lengthy ‘question and answer’ session afterwards. Many of us went out to a local Chinese restaurant later for an enjoyable lunch – and later that day I went to Evensong at St Peter’s Cathedral.

My impressions of both UU congregations were excellent. Their warmth and hospitality were most welcome. Undoubtedly the topics aired at both services were relevant and challenging, and rightly matters of concern for a church community. My one concern would be that in the airing of these topics the sense of worship could well be lost. A balance should always be struck between the airing of concerns and the ascription of worth, a balance easily upset.

**Gavin Lloyd**

~~~~~

Good News Litany by John Corrado

It is rare for me to repeat the publication of an article. But in these strange and difficult times, I make an exception, for this article, re-submitted by Rev Peter Godfrey.

Rev Peter Godfrey writes, I am half way through Steve Lingwood's excellent book 'Seeking Paradise'. On page 58 he asks, 'what gospel (good news) do Unitarians have to bring to humanity?' It reminded of words of the American UU minister, John Corrado, that I carry inside a copy of the New Testament.

Good News Litany by **John Corrado**, Unitarian Universalist minister

We believe there is a place at God's table for each and every child of earth.

Hey, ain't that good news!

We believe the giver of life has been given many names and loves the givers of all of them.

Hey, ain't that good news!

We are more interested in getting heaven into people now than getting people into heaven later.

Hey, ain't that good news!

We believe religious scriptures are open doors rather than sealed vaults.

Hey, ain't that good news!

We believe there is still some holy writ yet to be written.

Hey, ain't that good news!

We believe true evangelism is more preaching practiced than practiced preaching.

Hey, ain't that good news!

We believe peace and justice are not just words we form with our lips but realities we shape with our lives.

Hey, ain't that good news!

We believe in one race, the human race.

Hey, ain't that good news!

We believe we are one with stars and trees and tigers and rivers and all the stuff of life.

Hey, ain't that good news!

We believe our lives are all about growing hearts that love, minds that seek, and hands that serve.

Hey, ain't that good news! Amen

~~~~~

## **Book Reviews**

*Seeking Paradise: A Unitarian Mission for Our Time* is the latest theological work from the Lindsey Press. It is brilliantly written by our minister in Cardiff, Rev. Stephen Lingwood. Although there are many parts of the book that, for me, raise more questions than they answer it is nevertheless challenging and asking the right questions. Do please buy a copy.

By way of whetting your appetite I would like to mention just two points in the book that have made me think.

The first is the comment by Stephen that “In some broad sense we all must have faith, otherwise we would be spiritually paralysed in life, unable to see any purpose in getting out of bed and getting on with life.” (page 51) Since reading that I have wondered every morning – “What is it that gets me out of bed?”

Of course, being an old 'old man' means that often the first reason does not need telling! Seriously – why get out of bed? When I had a cancer operation three years ago one of the things I was told was that I should ignore the pain and worry – and get up no matter how I felt! Fortunately, thanks to the excellent care I received, I had little pain and made a good recovery. Nevertheless I think this is good advice. In one of his novels John Updike has a character who says that “If Unitarians had a creed it would be face it.”

When I wake up I am fortunate in that I have things to which to look forward. In the current situation it is 'simple' things – spending time with Sheila, meals to eat, books to read, a painting to attempt, a sit in the garden, a short walk.

I am also in the situation where I find myself needed. So I happily get up to help and be with Sheila. In some way or another we can all be useful to someone.

Do these things add up to a faith? I am not sure. What do you think? Certainly, these things are part of what give my life 'meaning'. Meaning lies in the seemingly little things that 'mean' a lot to us. We don't have to wander far and wide in search of meaning.

The second point concerns Stephen's statement about what Unitarians say in the face of evil. He asks in connection with human evil (page 49) how Unitarians can offer a solution “if they offer a liberal view that simply says, 'Human beings are just fine as they are.'” Do you think this is what we say?

Stephen wants us to have a doctrine of salvation, but Unitarians do not like the possible association with the orthodox doctrine's idea of a vengeful God and prefer to say, with Jesus, that what is

needed is for us to be more forgiving, loving and caring. Part of our Unitarian 'mission' I believe is to say that.

**Peter Godfrey**

*Life's Journey: Creating Unitarian Rites of Passage* by Daniel Costley.

This new volume, by Rev Daniel Costley, minister of Unitarian congregations in Sevenoaks, Tenterden and Dover, will be a boon and a blessing to everyone seeking to construct meaningful rites of passage for use in Unitarian churches, chapels and meeting houses, as well as other venues. Daniel explains its purpose in his *Introduction*: “Recognising the call for greater guidance on constructing unique rites of passage, and offering the necessary support for celebrants to contribute their own words, this book considers the purpose of each rite, the flow of emotion that the sequence of elements will generate, some indications of possible words and phrasing, and, to encourage difference, some case studies of particular and innovative services conducted by Unitarian ministers and lay leaders in recent times.”

There are six main chapters, on Child Namings, Weddings, Funerals, the Induction of Ministers and Lay Leaders, Ordination (now becoming more common for our new ministers) and Congregational Membership. Some chapters include helpful case studies for more challenging or unusual rites of passage, for example, *A Celebration of Adoption and Arrival*, *An Interfaith Marriage*, *A Funeral after Suicide*. And a list of top tips for conducting the particular rites, which I wish I had known when I started out!

Then there are four annexes, containing words for Child Namings, Weddings, Funerals and Membership Services, contributed by various Unitarian ministers and lay worship

leaders. And two appendixes: a Wedding Checklist, and a brief summary about the use of live and recorded music in rites of passage. The book ends with a list of useful further resources.

Daniel explains the shape and meaning of each rite of passage very clearly, and I am sure that this book is going to be an incredibly useful addition to the shelves of Unitarian celebrants everywhere.

**Sue Woolley**

**Although Essex Hall is closed at present, these two new books may be purchased by ringing Audrey Longhurst on 0207 240 2384.**

~~~~~

The Passion Play of Oberammergau

30 years ago this year, I attended my first Passion Play in Oberammergau, a town in the Bavarian Alps in Germany. I think it was during the month of May. But I've slept a lot since then!

I was 19 years old at the time, it was a coach trip, it was my first time abroad without my family, and my travelling companions were all members of the Girls Friendly Society (of which I am a member).

For those of you not acquainted with the Oberammergau Passion Play, a little history. Otto Huber, in his Chronology of the play writes:

“In the beginning was a vow... the Black Death spread rapidly, reaching Oberammergau in 1632. By October of the following year 80 deaths had already been recorded. The Chronicle of that

time reported how ‘... at this time of suffering the village councils of the Six and the Twelve met and vowed to perform the Passion Play every ten years, and from this time on not a single person more died’.”

The Passion refers not to some medieval or 17th century romance, but the Passion of Jesus Christ – a retelling of the final week of his life, from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. It was first performed in Oberammergau in 1634 and has been performed (more or less) every 10 years since (although they changed the date in 1680 so that it was the first year of every decade).

It is a stunning spectacle. The whole village is involved. The women grow their hair long, the men their hair and beards. (Apart from those playing the Romans of course!) It has a big chorus, lots of music, fabulous costumes, live animals, blood and gore. And in between the Acts there are living tableaux representing verses from the Bible. It is performed in a purpose built, huge open-air theatre (the seating area of which now has a roof, as it is performed come rain or shine) with *the most* uncomfortable seats ever (don't forget your inflatable cushion!).

I was very suitably impressed – I was even more impressed when my friend Edna managed to get me Jesus's autograph – as played by a lovely chap, name of Rudolph, who was in black leathers on his motorbike!! (I can also remember being frightened out of my wits by the sight of a policeman with a gun...)

In 1980, over the season of the play, 460,000 attended. In 1990, when I attended for the second time, 480,000 watched it. And I was lucky enough to attend during the year 2000.

The play was not performed in the years 1770, 1810, 1870, (1920's was moved to 1922), and 1940, usually due to war, but

sometimes permission was not granted because of wrangling over the text of the play (they had to have clerical permission) or because they overspent on the budget!

And, sadly, it will not be performed in 2020 because of the Corona pandemic. But it has been rescheduled for 2022. Whatever you think of, or believe about, Jesus of Nazareth I recommend that you go to see this spectacle if you can. It truly is remarkable.

Closer to home, in a small museum in the Village of Eyam in Derbyshire, you can learn how, in 1665, this small village lost 260 inhabitants to the Bubonic Plague. They decided to stop the spread of the disease to the surrounding areas by sealing themselves off. Food was delivered to a perimeter wall, and the money for goods was left in a bowl of vinegar (the only sort of disinfectant they had). This act of self-sacrifice did indeed work, and the story is now told in schools to this day. I wonder how many head teachers repeated the story to today's children as they closed their doors last week.

Memories of both these events and villages came strongly to mind as I've been reading and hearing about the spread of the Corona virus around the world. I'm not sure that if Wythall and Hollywood make a vow to produce a huge production of faith every 10 years it would save us from this virus, but I do know that taking precautions and following NHS and Government advice will help a lot of us. Medicine and understanding of how illnesses work and spread have come a long way since the 17th century.

And I do know faith will uphold many of us as we live through this difficult time. My hope is that love and friendship will prevail, and that our community, and the communities of the world, will

grow to appreciate and respect life and nature more than they have in the past.

My prayer is that everyone finds the love and support they need at this time. Please know that we are thinking of you. Enjoy what time you can and get through the rest of the time as best you can.



PS It's not a giant bookmark – it's a small chalice!

If you wish to find out more about the Passion Play or about the village of Eyam, the following links may help.

<https://www.passionsspiele-oberammergau.de/en/home>
www.eyam-museum.org.uk

Diane Rutter

~~~~~

## IT Support

With technology being such a lifeline for communication at the moment, we are conscious of those who are less confident in using the internet and taking part in videocalls. We are delighted to announce that Netserve Ltd, an IT support company, is stepping in to offer us some help.

Will Bellows, Netserve’s founder says “We are offering telephone advice to the Unitarian community who are currently on lockdown and want to stay connected with their friends, family and the Unitarian community via video calls. Please contact our dedicated helpdesk on 0203 728 8415 and we will be happy to help.” Will has also confirmed that his team will be happy to help those who are working out how to livestream services and create other online opportunities for connection.

Please do pass on the contact information to those in your congregation who may need help in getting set-up and confident – Netserve are ready to help with any tech challenges, large or small!

From UNI-News, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020

- ~~~~~

### District Round-up

I sent an e-mail round, asking how congregations were keeping in touch during this time of lockdown, and the responses were wonderful... see below.

#### Birmingham and Kidderminster

How the world has changed and something we never thought would happen, has. Our church buildings may temporarily be out of use as we social distance to stay home, save the NHS and save lives. But a church is always, always the people, and we are learning to meet in new ways.

The Birmingham UNM and Kidderminster congregations meet via Zoom twice a week. We have a weekly Sunday service at 11 am on Zoom, followed by coffee and chat. Then on Wednesday we meet in our Zoom Reading Group at 6pm, to share reflections

on different themes. It is wonderful to be face to face through Zoom, but of course, not everyone is tech savvy or even tech comfortable. The good old telephone call and letter, or e-mail and card also allows us to keep in touch with one another. As I have grown into this new way of doing church, the problem is not in keeping in touch with one another, but the inability to touch each other outside of words. May the days of hugs return soon.

#### Winnie Gordon

~~~~~

Mark Hutchinson (Cotswold Group Minister)

Touching the Spirit Tuesdays and Thursdays at 11am
Heart and Soul Saturdays at 11am and Sundays at 6 pm.
Email reverendhutch@gmail.com for zoom details.

Touching the Spirit

Listening: there are chosen words and phrases and we listen to others as they express how those words relate to or affect them today.

Readings: poetry, reflection or narrative the host reads to the spirit of the gathering.

Discussion: a short period reflecting our experience of the gathering and beyond.

Silent meditation: we finish together in silence.

The gathering will last about an hour and no longer than 75 minutes.

Heart and Soul

Heart and Soul is a contemplative spiritual gathering in which you can take time to reflect on life in the company of others. Each session follows a regular pattern, including readings and music from an eclectic range of sources, time for guided prayers of

gratitude, compassion for others, self-reflection, and silent meditation.

The session topic changes each week.

Bayshill Church, Cheltenham

How are we as a congregation coping with COVID-19 and the lockdown?

The last time we met face to face was on March 15th for our membership service. We were aware of upholding the two meter social distancing then... we placed the circle of chairs further apart and tried to maintain this for coffee afterwards. It all felt new and strange; we often forgot and then laughed nervously and stepped back from each other. We decided then that we would no longer have services at Bayshill but would go 'online' as too many of our members fell into the vulnerable group to keep meeting in person. It felt sombre and sad as we parted; someone commented, "we'll look back at this time together in weeks to come as very precious and special."

So what do we do now? We have our usual weekly 11 o'clock service but it's on Zoom; we have Mark our minister twice a month and other service leaders for the other Sundays. We have kept the same pattern as before. Mark provides regular pan 'Cotswold' Heart and Soul services and "Touching the Spirit" sessions too. (see above)

Alison, who keeps our Cheltenham register noted an interesting trend in attendances: 1st week: 9; 2nd 13; 3rd 15; and 4th 19....and these numbers have generally been sustained since.

How come? Many reasons... apparently research from the Tear Fund in recent weeks has shown a 25% increase in people tuning

into online church services... 45% of people say they are now praying.

So we see faces of people who have been before but through complicated commitments haven't been able to attend more recently; we have new folks as well who are especially welcome... and our more familiar beloved members too.

There is clearly a need now generally for people to come together to foster hope, gain support and feel the bigger benign 'more than' that joining in worship together can bring.

We are learning all the time how to make the virtual service a more fulfilling, inspiring and satisfying experience. Kevin puts hours into varying the format so it's not just the service leader's talking head and so far he has 'hosted' all the services as he 'holds' the Bayshill Zoom pro licence. This means he opens them up, admits people in and signs off at the end...his work has been invaluable.

We soon found that having interaction with congregants in the worship service was too difficult in terms of the time delays and differing sound qualities, so these are limited to the very end of the Sunday service. To compensate for the social more pastoral needs of meeting together we have two 'chat' based 'meetings' in the week run by lay service leaders. We put all the details of these virtual sessions and services on our website.

I host a Tuesday zoom 'coffee' morning and Penny a Thursday 'tea time' afternoon. I tend to use a small ministry type approach with a check in and check out but sometimes this gets waylaid. These are opportunities to offload, share experiences, have a grump and also laugh together...

I finish the Tuesday morning time together with this prayer:

‘Lord, give me coffee to change the things I can
And friends to help me accept the things I cannot.’
Amen.

Cressida Pryor

~~~~~

**Oat Street Chapel, Evesham**

At Oat Street Chapel we have mainly concentrated on the use of The Phone and The Written Word, be it by post or e-mail. Our minister, Mark Hutchinson, rings or e-mails us all individually from time to time to check that we are all right. He also sends us regular written Reflections with illustrations. These are creative, original and much appreciated. Other committee members also periodically ring round the congregation and the committee keeps in telephone and e-mail touch with each other. For someone like myself who does not really like talking on the phone, it is a reminder that the phone Can Be A Good Thing and can be used for connection, pleasure and relaxation, rather than just for urgent business. Items such as MUA services and Uni-News are also forwarded to chapel members and this offers connection with the wider Unitarian movement.

Those of us who connect into Facebook have the chance to follow our minister's multiple posts. Mark is also active on Zoom on which he offers two "Heart and Soul" sessions and two "Touching the Spirit" sessions each week. These have provided solace and sociability for some of our congregation and for one or two other friends from the Evesham and Cheltenham areas. The sessions have also brought in Unitarians from the wider movement and some individuals from all over the country who are new to Unitarianism. In those sessions it has been wonderful to be able to break up long lonely days by contemplating some significant

words and ideas, listening to lovely music, joining together in loving prayer and realising that we are not alone.

Nothing however can fully compensate for the lack of a "change of scene" but in the circumstances we have done what we can and have used the isolation as an opportunity to rest, appreciate the mostly glorious weather and to connect to what we have most immediately around us. We are hoping for at least a partial relaxation of the lock down in the coming days.

**Lesley Harris**

~~~~~

Kingswood Unitarians

Diane Rutter, Lay Assistant at Kingswood, has been producing a weekly newsletter for the congregation. They are also keeping in touch via Zoom and Whatsapp, including virtual coffee mornings, when they post photos of their mugs and snacks! And their minister, Rev Ant Howe, is posting a weekly service on YouTube. Here is an excerpt from the first newsletter...

“It’s now been a few weeks since we were all able to meet in person. I’m missing our Sunday Services and midweek gatherings more than I can say. The church building seems too quiet, yet I know that we are all BEING the church wherever we are. I’m aware that many of our members and friends are praying for each other, phoning each other, and staying in touch as much as possible. At the end of our church Services we always say, ‘Love is the doctrine of this church’ and I am seeing that love being expressed in our community beyond the confines of the church walls.

We’re still trying to find as many ways as possible to keep our community vibrant: there’s a lively church Whatsapp group, Services from Kingswood are being posted on Facebook and on

YouTube, and our organist Peter has posted several pieces of music for us to enjoy.

However, I know that some people in our community don't have internet access and so are not able to enjoy these connections, so I am grateful to Diane for taking the initiative with this newsletter.

Diane and I are available for a chat by phone. Do let us know if you are aware of anyone in our congregation who needs support or prayer.

Kingswood has an important role to play in the local community as well. We are receiving lots of communications from people in our locality who just need an extra bit of pastoral support at this time.

As you will know, I was due to be leaving Kingswood at the end of May, but I have now put this on hold as I want to be here to see Kingswood through this challenging period.

Life has changed for all of us in recent weeks. It's not easy being isolated when it means we are separated from family, friends and loved ones. I'm praying that we will all feel God walking with us as companion and friend at this time. I'm holding on to words which we find in the Bible, in the Letter to the Hebrews: *"for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.' So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?'"*

Do take care of yourself and stay safe. Please know that I am praying for our congregation every day. When we are allowed to meet in person our church will again ring out with praise, and our church community will be restored by love: God's, yours and mine."

Ant Howe



Shrewsbury Unitarians

Here at Shrewsbury Unitarians there has been a buzz of communication over the past weeks since we have been unable to hold our services and meet up during the week, which would have been our usual habit. We have continued to send out our weekly News from the Pews – albeit a rather extended version to capture all the various contributions from congregation members. We have been having a weekly challenge – which is properly not a particularly apt description, as rather than a challenge it has been more of an 'unveiling'! Each week someone has chosen a subject for congregation members to comment on – these have included: favourite recipes, favourite walks, favourite childhood holiday, favourite gadget, an inherited gift and best childhood reads. People have shared these to our congregation's Whatsapp group or sent via e-mail for compiling in to a document – there has been a lot of copying and posting taking place to gather the information and redistribute it, ensuring that those that don't use the whole variety of 'social media' tools aren't left out. Good old snail mail still has its uses! There is a general consensus that we will know even more about each other by the time we are able to meet up again. We usually have a poetry morning once a month and this has continued through Whatsapp and e-mail, and there have been some lovely contributions throughout the weeks.

Whatsapp has provided a great opportunity for day to day chit chat, with lots of sharing of inspirational poems and videos and photos, and this has really helped people to stay connected and upbeat. We have also been holding an after service Zoom coffee morning on Sundays – this has worked very well, mostly because 'attendees' are very respectful listeners and there haven't been a lot of people talking over each other, which can often be the case during virtual meetups. Everyone has thoroughly appreciated

receiving Sue's service and enjoy sharing their thoughts during the 'coffee morning'.

We are a very close knit congregation and there has been a lot of phoning around – this has been very spontaneous without the need of a formal structure. The letter writers amongst the congregation have continued to put pen to paper and I know the gift of a letter or card has been treasured.

We have tried to maintain a little presence on other 'social media' platforms – Twitter and Facebook, which has acted more as a reminder to the wider world that we are still here and tends to have taken the form of a 'Thought for the Day'.

All in all, the congregation have risen to the challenges of the day, but I know we all miss seeing each other and look forward to the day when we will all be together again – I can almost feel a communal hug coming on!

Fiona Checkley

~~~~~

**Stourbridge**

Here at Stourbridge, with no church newsletter, we have been keeping in contact with each other via e-mail and texting. We also e-mail each other mainly on a Sunday or Monday to discuss Sue's online service. We (Carolyn and I and I know David M has been doing this too) have also been doing some shopping for Audrey and dropping it off to her while keeping social distancing/face masks and gloves etc...

**David Taylor**

Yes, I can echo all David has said, and I'm sure we are connected on the spiritual plane as well.

The only problem is missing each other, meeting together for Sunday Worship and our church, though we all have keys and call in anytime for private prayer and meditation.

**David Mearman**

~~~~~

Gavin Lloyd

A good question. In my case it is the rediscovery of the undemanding 'just a chat' telephone call-and as I type this, I've just been interrupted with a lengthy call(!) Before 'lockdown' there was always the chore of leaving telephone messages for absent ones, and wondering if and when a call would be returned, and if so whether I would be out... And often having to take a note of what was said and remembering, not to mention difficulties with trying to understand poor speech and coping with the sheer intrusiveness and interruptive nature of the telephone – not to mention the 'spam' and fraud brigade. I will gladly revert to e-mail when the time comes, but meanwhile the unconditional, pressure free, undemanding human telephone call is a pleasant novelty. Having to hold the line in a telephone queue, however, remains a nightmare!, Not to mention trying to understand some poor bloke eking out a living in a call centre on the other side of the earth, exploited by a 'fat cat' corporation on this side.

~~~~~

**Warwick Unitarians: Pandemonium in the Pandemic**

Actually, “pandemonium” is not the correct word, as its definition is wild and noisy disorder, confusion and chaos. I wonder if there is a better word? A word which describes calm, quiet, peaceful and sunny disorder, confusion and chaos?

Talking of words, I have found that this pandemic has caused me to develop a new vocabulary, particularly for verbs: I now Zoom, Skype, Facetime and Whatsapp my friends on a daily basis. I have found Zooming to be great fun.

The other day I joined a Zoom meeting hosted by a friend, Julian. There were about 30 people there from all over the Midlands, joining to read spiritual passages in celebration of Baha'i festival. I didn't know many of the people, but fortunately Rosemary, another member of the Warwick chapel, was there, which helped to make me feel more at home. The participants joined from their own homes except for one who joined from the empty carpark of East Midlands Airport on his phone, having just returned from flying all over the empty skies of Scandinavia delivering cargo. I wondered how many faces he was able to see on his phone. I was on my iPad and could only see nine faces on my screen, until one kind person said that if I swiped my screen, I could then see another nine. One learns as one goes along, and certainly using the technology is the way to learn.

We don't have many Zoomers or Skypers at Warwick Chapel, so we tend to keep in touch on e-mail, or in a very old-fashioned way of communicating known as the landline telephone. We keep in touch, as we miss each other very much. Our chapel and our meetings, our companionship and precious friendships are so important to us all, so it is vital that we keep in contact.

The lovely audio service so kindly sent by Sue to our congregation each week has been a very welcome and helpful way of keeping in contact. Also, our Friday meditation group has continued to meet remotely on Friday mornings at 10.30, and we keep in touch by e-mail.

The Chapel garden is looking particularly beautiful at the moment, with many varieties of flowers in bloom, and our star attraction, the honeysuckle bloomed and entwined in the laburnum tree, so it is sad that we can't enjoy it as we usually do at this time of year. However, here is a photo...



I must finish now as my mobile has pinged, which means that a Whatsapp message has arrived (I hope it is a comic cartoon or video adding some humour to our precarious situation). Also, I have a Skype phone call to make to my friend in Vancouver. After that, I must catch up with my YouTube daily global situation report from Dr John Campbell (brilliant and not to be missed). Ah, the wonders of modern technology!

**Elaine Nomura**

## Awakening(s)

I wasn't very well recently. Nothing serious – just a series of those minor ailments that can make you feel pretty grotty for a week or so. As I began to feel better I experienced a sort of awakening – a renewed appreciation and gratitude for the ordinary. Being out in the fresh air after moping around the house, the brightness outside as signs of early spring begin to appear, actually feeling hungry again and having a choice of food at hand.

I remember experiencing something similar, more dramatically, years ago after doing an underwater dive. It was the only open water dive I ever did and was in the least glamorous location you can imagine – a reservoir near Bolton. No coral reefs or exotic fish there – just a rusty old car and some discarded coke bottles. Coming up into the open air after the murky, and actually quite scary, dive made everything seem incredibly bright and beautiful. I thought then, and now, how amazing it would be if I could bottle the feeling and just be able to have this heightened sense of awareness and gratitude whenever I needed to, without having to be ill or do an underwater dive first.

Because we do get jaded don't we? The pleasure we take in the fresh and new fades with familiarity. Things that were once treats and luxuries become essentials, then taken for granted. Stuff that we craved loses its gloss and once we have that new pair of shoes, new car, or try out that new restaurant, we maybe don't enjoy it as much as, or for as long, as we thought we would. Or we just feel that we're treading water – waiting for a new and better phase of our lives to begin.

I wonder if this is what that line in the Lord's Prayer is about. When we ask 'Lead us not into temptation' – it's not so much

about resisting that chocolate bar or glass of wine but about not getting pulled down this road where everything seems better in the future or somewhere else – always to be chasing or waiting for something and marking time until we get there. And in doing so, missing our lives right here and now.

I know some people who practise Gratitude by pausing at some point every day to think about and write down, say, five things for which they are grateful – right now. It's a very simple way to remind ourselves to appreciate our lives, and it sounds like a good idea to me. By taking time to reflect on what we are thankful for right now perhaps we can connect again with that sense of newness, of awakening, of really being alive.

I can't bottle that intense feeling of awakening and gratitude for life, but perhaps with practice I can experience it more often. What ways can you think of to practise Gratitude?

*as originally broadcast on BBC Radio Shropshire, Pause for Thought  
16th February*

**Alison Patrick**

~~~~~

A moment of

Wonder

Attunement

Knowing that the

Earth is warming up

Nature

Illustrates

New

Growth to make us

Smile

Debra Burbery

~~~~~

Once when discussing a weighty tome called *The Curse of Ignorance* by the Spiritualist and amateur historian Arthur Findlay, it occurred to me that there were many types of ignorance. Similarly, I have been finding in these past few weeks that there are many types of awakening, both personal and general. The best of the personal awakenings for me has been when Sunrise Radio, the Bollywood music channel I listen to, plays any particularly good song just as I am dropping off to sleep. Those particularly good songs re-awaken my interest in the rather boring language learning I have been doing as my "working from home" and inspire me to carry on with it the following day.

During the day, firstly I am awakened more to the flight of birds, the beauty of trees and the many types of roof tiles in existence than I have ever been before since they are all directly in my field of vision from the top floor lounge I am in. As background noise I truly appreciate the tweeting of the birds and the sound of the breeze through the trees. You may have heard of white noise, well this is green noise, and it's far better.

Furthermore, staying obediently at home awakens me to the entertainment which is most closely available, i.e. the TV, which

previously I had despised. More than ever I have become awake to the fact that it is just as important to be cheered up as it is to be connected. The American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* at lunchtime is my reward for a morning's work and Agatha Christie's *Poirot* in the evening is my reward for an afternoon's work. Sometimes I also watch *The Chase* which may be considered to be a simple gameshow, but you can learn a lot from it. I have admired the sheer guts and good humour of the people who take part and I have very much been awakened to their stoicism and dignity in defeat, when they lose all the money they have built up to the Chaser who so often just beats them to the conclusion by a mere second or two.

Continuing in a spiritual vein, I have also been awakened by the various forms of communication and connection that we are having during this lockdown. I have found that the phone does not bite, online Zoom gatherings do not crash my mobile and it is a revelation to listen to the wide variety of services from several Ministers throughout our Movement on YouTube.

On a deeper note, I quite often think of the *Diary of Anne Frank*. Our lockdown now is nothing compared to her experiences. The world situation, bad though it may seem, is not as bad as it was in the 1940s. Regarding our current predicament, I would nevertheless comment that a cloud is still a cloud no matter how much silver lining it may have. Looking at the clouds through my window, I see that they are a mixture of large and small, thick and thin and that there is white and grey to be found in each individual cloud. Perhaps that could be used an analogy of our current situation. Finally, I am very awakened to the fact that there is so much suffering going on during this lockdown and it's not evenly distributed. While we need to seek the positive and celebrate the heroism and coming together that has happened, we

should observe this quietly without overstatement, out of respect to those who have suffered and lost so much.

**Lesley Harris**



*What it means to be awake*

The German author, Friedrich Schiller once wrote, “Do not lose yourself in the distant time! Take the moment that’s yours.”

It occurs to me that this is what is meant by awakening – taking the moment that is ours, being awake to it. Over the past few years, I have come to believe that God’s presence is everywhere, in our ordinary, everyday lives, if we had but eyes to see, and ears to hear.

I believe that through sacred living – weaving moments of attention into those everyday lives, and recognising the sacred there, we will find that which gives our lives purpose and meaning. Sacred living is about living with a new level of awareness, about being awakened. It is about going through each normal day paying attention to what is happening in each passing moment. It is about noticing the presence of the divine, the numinous, everywhere; in the natural world, in other people, in ourselves, and in things that happen to us, Then, as Mary Jean Irion writes, “Normal day, let me be aware of the treasure you are. Let me learn from you, love you, savour you, before you depart. Let me not pass you by in quest of some rare and perfect tomorrow.”

Because today is all we have. Today is the only place in which time touches eternity. I love the Sanskrit affirmation: “Look to this day – For it is life, the very life of life. In its brief course lie all the verities and realities of your existence: the bliss of growth, the

glory of action, the splendour of beauty. For yesterday is but a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision, but today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Look well, therefore, to this day.”

Yet how often do we spend our days (or one day, or even part of a day) totally present, totally awake? Appreciating every moment, every interaction, every person or object or thing our senses come into contact with? I know I don’t!

So how do we spend our days? Many of us, especially as we grow older, spend them living in the past, looking back with either pleasure or regret (or a mixture of both). And there’s absolutely nothing wrong with being nostalgic about our past lives, so long as the past is a place we visit, rather than the place we live. As the wise one said, “yesterday is but a dream.” It is no longer real.

Others of us spend our days in the future, always heading towards the next goal, the next hill to climb. Our diaries are full for weeks to come (or were, before COVID-19) and there always seems to be a long to-do list on the go. I write a new one, every Monday morning, to make sure that all the things I need to get done in the forthcoming week, somehow get done. And yes, forward planning is important, as we try to juggle home life, work life, looking after children, looking after parents, some sort of social life. If we didn’t plan, everything would fall down crash. But every moment we spend in the future, is a moment that we are not awake to what is happening right now.

There is a beautiful prayer, quoted by Rachel Naomi Remen, in her book, *My Grandfather’s Blessings*, which sums all this up, much more beautifully than I can:



### 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 Summer/Autumn issue will be published in January**

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

**by Friday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

*Thank you!*