



Unitarian Peace Fellowship Newsletter

*For all within our denomination who witness to the
belief that war and preparation for war are
failures of humanity*

Issue 22, May 2023

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www.ukunitarians.org.uk/peace/

From the Editor

I am delighted to offer you all a bumper issue of our *Peace Fellowship Newsletter* this time. We had a good session at the GA meetings, which is reported on page 5.

We were pleased to welcome Rev Julio Torres as our new Treasurer and thank Rev Celia Cartwright for her years of service. Julio will be reviewing our membership shortly, so if you have not yet sent your annual subscription to us, please do so as soon as possible. Otherwise, this will be the last issue of the *Newsletter* you receive. (contact details on page 19).

Our involvement with the Peace Pole Project is new, and our Chair, Rev John Carter, went up / across to the Old Chapel in Great Hucklow to dedicate and bless the Peace Pole there. If anyone is interested in establishing their own Peace Pole at their church, chapel or meeting house, please contact John. (contact details on page 19).

I was also pleased to receive two other articles from committee members: a report of a service honouring Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy, which took place at Golders Green Unitarians on 30th January, by Rev Michael Allured, and a thoughtful reflection on the evils of nuclear weapons by Rev Feergus O'Connor.

Finally, I'd love to produce another bumper issue like this, in November. But that depends on you... if you feel moved to write an article about any aspect of Peace and Peace-making, please send it to me. (contact details on page 19).

Sue Woolley

Musings from the Chair

“The dominant religion on the planet is not Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or Judaism but the pervasive faith in violence”
~ Walter Wink

This quote has been crossing my social media sites much in the past few weeks. I looked for its citation and at best guess seems to come from his work the Powers That Be.

In my search, and I forgot why I wanted to bring this to your attention, I read various critiques of his work, many excellent points about injustice etc., and how we can respond. The fact is, Wink, too, tried to speak to this, as did Dietrich Bonhoeffer before him. Bonhoeffer basically saw that there are extreme times in which we must simply recognise that violence is the option. Wink speaks of his experiences working for non-violent resistance in South Africa during apartheid. He also speaks to Gandhi's understanding that if our only response to injustice is between submission/apathy and violence, then violence is the better option. Simply apathy and submission kill the soul.

I saw this when I worked with a small Black Mennonite congregation on the South Side of Chicago in the 1980s. One of our brilliant young men couldn't get into University, because his high scores in an academically poor rated school meant that he could not meet basic requirements for enrolment. His only way out of the “ghetto” was via the US Army. He could get an education and training there and, if he were lucky enough, benefits to pay for further education. This is a whole other conversation how racism effects the ability for persons of colour to actually receive promised enlistment benefits.

It is clear that it is easy to be an advocate of non-violent action, or of pacifism, when you benefit greatly from the power system of the nation, culture, etc.

This has taught me to shut up and listen to the experiences of others, to allow them to shape and find their best path in this troubling field. This has often been the case when observing the struggle for justice against racism, heterosexism (yes I use this term and not the preferred terms of homophobia or heteronormative,) sexism, militarism, capitalism.... Isms are the belief, viewpoint that one way of being is superior to all others. Racism in our western context is the belief in the superiority of the white person over all others..... And that leads to injustice and the place where we must be aware of our privilege, and thus struggle with how we address the injustices around us.

A simple question of how do I live out the peace witness in my everyday work and life?

Rev John Carter, UPF Chair

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**Peace Fellowship Matters**  
**PUTTING IT POLITELY,**  
**WE NEED THE MONEY, PLEASE!**

As the Fellowship is now becoming active again, following the joy of meeting in person at this year's GA Meetings, we would like you to pay your subscription for 2023/24 please. We have decided to maintain the current rates: £9 for an individual; £15 for a couple, £18 for a small group, £27 for a large group.

**Our 2023/24 Appeal**, which was launched at the General Assembly meetings last month, is in aid of **The Centre for Reconciliation, Lincoln**. As John Carter told us during the

Peace Fellowship session, they are working towards improving relationships between members of different faiths.

**Please, if you can, donate** to our Appeal for the Centre for Reconciliation in Lincoln right now.

**We would be very grateful** if you would send your cheques, made payable to 'The Unitarian Peace Fellowship', to our Treasurer, Julio Torres. (address on back page). Please write on the back of the cheque what the payment is for (i.e. subs / appeal / both). Thank you very much.

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Report of the Peace Fellowship session at 2023 GA meetings

Subash Chellaiah, Executive Director of the Centre for Reconciliation in Lincoln, who was to have been our Guest Speaker, was taken ill at the last moment, so John Carter explained something about the Centre for Reconciliation in Lincoln, whom the Peace Fellowship will be supporting in this year's Annual Appeal.

Their main thrust is founded on the belief that if we want peace in the world, we have to get religious communities talking to each other. There are local hygiene banks in the Anglican, Pentecostal and Unitarian chapels in Lincoln. They do community outreach and there is a chat café which meets once a month, which facilitates a common bond through the sharing of food. There is also a community craft group at the Unitarian chapel, as well as a gardening project. The Centre also sponsors interfaith events. The members come together to work and pray – it's not just a talking

shop. They are looking for areas of resonance which can open understanding between the different faith traditions.

They are trying to establish an interfaith library. They aim to follow the IARF model of reconciliation work – trying to establish relationships. Their long range goal is to work in South India on interfaith matters, building relationships through education and service.

The meeting was then thrown open for discussion. Our new Treasurer, Julio Torres, commented that Lewisham Unitarians host Peace of Cake – food-based, with good conversation between faiths. Everyone has a place at the table. No faith is better than any other faith. This works under the umbrella of the One Spirit Interfaith Foundation.

Cody Coyne commented about the enrichment which comes from interfaith engagement, and the sharing of differing viewpoints. He thought we should invite other faiths to use our spaces.

An interfaith minister, Rev Malaika, told the meeting about Peace Mala – an organisation in Swansea which produces interfaith bracelets in rainbow colours with glass beads.
<http://peacemala.org.uk>

John Carter commented that the Unitarian Peace Fellowship are ambassadors to the Charter for Compassion, and called for us to “think globally, but work locally”, commenting that local collaboration was the way forward to better understanding. He has also sent this reflection on our GA session:

1. Before the GA meetings, the ministers meet to have a conference and AGM. I report this, as our conversations this year were around our Unitarian social witness. I was one of the

presenters, with the focus on Peace and Peace-making, Bridge Building, and Non-violent forms of activism and resistance. It is based on my study of the Hebrew Bible and of the prophet Jesus. It is a relational construct, not a rules-based command. It is not something you simply believe, but study, converse about (and that means argue when needed) to develop a way of living. A lifestyle based on good, life-giving relationships with others. “Others” are defined in the Bible as your neighbour, meaning any person of your tribe or nationality, and strangers; that is, any person *not* of your tribe or nationality. As many said at the time of Jesus, the Torah is summed up this way:

“You shall love the Divine Other, with all your Heart, Mind, Soul and Body... And you shall love the Human Other as you love yourself.”

And Jesus added “Love your enemies” to drive the love point home....

These laws of love can also be called Righteousness: being in good relationship with the Divine, and Justice; being in good relationship with the Other. You can also see this relational quality in the Jesus materials, in the way he speaks of God as ‘Papa’, or ‘Daddy’ or ‘Dad’... an intimate, familial quality, not a formal societal title such as Father.

These are the foundational ideals on which *Shalom* is built. A wholistic approach to life and living. For those of Hebrew faith, which included Jesus, peace means not an absence of war, but a way of living upon the earth.

It was a good pre-GA gathering. Julio Torres (now our Treasurer) presented his study and work within forming a Unitarian Liberation Theology, and Ann Howell, the GA’s Social Action Officer, spoke then led us in a conversation around what we can

and are doing for justice. In our working for Peace, we are also engaged in work for Justice.

2. Out of the conversations at our session, we now have several people who want to engage with the Fellowship and also work on developing study and worship packets around various peace and justice issues: racism, militarism, inter-faith conversations on peace. We will also be working on a study packet for better understanding of transitioning and of Transpersons’ lives and living, and how we can better support our Trans siblings.

3. We have a couple of new committee members and I hope they will introduce themselves as we work towards becoming more active and visible in our witness for peace and non-violent ways to solve conflicts.

Sue Woolley and John Carter

UPF HIGHLIGHTED CHARITY FOR 2023/24

UPF invites you to support the Centre for Reconciliation in Lincoln by friending them on social media as well as with financial contributions.



Webpage: [https:// www.tcf.reconciliation.org/](https://www.tcf.reconciliation.org/)

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/TheCentreforReconciliation/>

The Peace Pole Project by John Carter

I am assuming you have seen the *Inquirer* article on the dedication and blessing of the Peace Pole at Great Hucklow chapel. It was led by me and the lay leader of Hucklow, Ed Fordham.

A couple of years ago Ed had a conversation with the late Ernest Baker about the witness of the chapel, and the idea of having a Peace Pole there grew from that conversation. Ed then approached me about the history and theology behind peace poles. After the conversation, he and the Hucklow community began working on this, decided what they wanted, and then got and worked the material and painted it.

And we gathered on a late April Friday evening, with the FOY Society, and Ukrainian refugees who are in Hucklow, to witness and pray for peace. It was a lovely event. John Hewerdine supplied the photos for our use.

Many of us find our hearts going out to the Ukrainians as they struggle against the aggression of the Russian government. We need to be aware of what is unreported in the media and that is the brutal crackdown on any anti-invasion work or attitudes within Russian society. Equally, in the Ukraine, any Ukrainian CO (conscientious objector) is also being met with obstruction and prison. In the report I read on the Ukrainian COs, they want to help the country, but not by serving in the military. There are still Mennonites living in the Ukraine, some are now in the occupied territories. It is important that we find ways to witness to all our desires for peace, and to remember and support the Russians who are opposed to their country's aggression and the Ukrainians who desire to serve in non-military capacities.

Many chapels have or are planning to have Peace Poles. In Lincoln we are working with others to set up several poles and hopefully grow the number of sites to different groups, faith or secular.

If you would like to have a conversation around having a peace pole please contact me.

If you already have a peace pole please contact me as we would like to establish a directory and help develop a network and Peace Pilgrimage throughout the UK.



John Carter (UPF Chair), Vince McCully (GA President) and Ed Fordham (Lay leader at Hucklow Chapel) with the Peace Pole.

Photo by John Hewerdine

Words by John Carter at the Inauguration of the Peace Pole

The Catholic Theologian Hans Kung said...

"No peace among the nations
without peace among the religions.

No peace among the religions
without dialogue between the religions"

We have joined together in this sacred space, in this holy hour, to dedicate and bless a witness for peace.

Since the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, a movement for dedicating our lives to the cause of peace, not simply an avoidance of war, but a dedication for finding ways to solve human conflict without resorting to violence, has grown throughout the world.

In the 1970s I saw my first peace pole, it was in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California, erected at Camp Peaceful Pines, by a denomination of Schwarzenau Brethren, one of the Historic Peace traditions within Christianity. This memorial to the work of peace, was simple and elegantly so... three poles which they carved to represent to cause and call of Peace and of building bridges between peoples and with creation.

Since the late 1970s, an organisation developed to promote peace on earth, and the advancement of the Peace Pole Project, which often uses the phrase "may peace prevail on earth" as central to the witness of the monuments being erected.

We are here to due to conversations amongst Unitarians, communities, and people of faith, and people of no faith, to mark and make this witness for peace.

Remembering them and the fact that peace is more than the absence of war, but a call to a different way of living, way of being, way of engaging with the world around us....

We dedicate and bless this pole.....

Dedication Litany

Leader: This evening we celebrate the relationships we have made with others,

People who once were strangers to us, join us as friends...
People who came seeking shelter and safety, join us in our mutual search for peace...

We stand together here to bless and dedicate this simple pole to bear witness to our desire and willingness to find the ways of peace in our lives, our living and our communities.

We dedicate this Peace Pole by remembering that many have lost their lives, their livelihood in conflicts and war..

All: "May Peace prevail on earth."

Leader: We bless this Peace Pole by remembering the women and men who have been harmed by domestic violence...

All: "May Peace prevail on earth."

Leader: We dedicate this space to bear witness to the age old dream of shalom, for all life to be able to rest in their places of living without fear, and without violence...

All: "May Peace prevail on earth."

Leader: We bless this sacred space by our presence here, by our prayers, and by our desire to do that which makes for peace...

All: "May Peace prevail on earth."

Leader: We dedicate this place of witness by dedication ourselves to pray for peace, to actively work for peace, and to give ourselves over to a life of compassion and caring for all life on our beautiful blue home... May our prayer and life always be....

All: "May Peace prevail on earth."

Unitarians honour Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy by Michael Allured

The 75th anniversary of the passing of Mahatma Gandhi on 30 January was fittingly commemorated by the inauguration of a new interfaith Red Cross fund, the Gandhi Tolstoy Peace Appeal, which honours the inspirational peace witness and humanitarian ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy, both revered prophets of universal nonviolence and interreligious understanding.

In an address at an interfaith event organised by the Gandhi Foundation at Golders Green Unitarians Rev. Feargus O'Connor claimed that the wisdom of Gandhi's ethic of nonviolence, *ahimsa*, rooted in Indian spiritual wisdom and Hindu and Jain ethics, and Leo Tolstoy's determined and courageous stand against the evil and what Martin Luther King called the 'madness of war' had been utterly vindicated by the disastrous course of the present murderous and destructive war raging in Ukraine.

As Honorary Secretary of the World Congress of Faith and a member of the Gandhi Foundation and the Unitarian Peace Fellowship, Feargus urged people of goodwill of all faiths to listen to the urgent pleas for peace by the UN Secretary General, Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama as well as American and British Quakers and strive to do all they possibly could to put an immediate end to this war, which has already cost over 200,000 lives and many more shocking injuries. Vast environmental and economic damage has been inflicted and unbearable suffering caused. Many Ukrainian and Russian mothers mourn departed loved ones.

Feargus spoke of the 'moral imperative to flood Ukraine not with lethal weapons but massive humanitarian, particularly medical, aid through the Red Cross and other charities to succour the victims of this tragic and futile war'. He invoked the noble example and inspirational lives of Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Thich Nhat Hanh, Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama and other spiritual apostles of nonviolence.

Should not our understanding of the 'interconnectedness of all living beings, the protection of our home planet and the moral imperative to strive for the common good make us heed and urgently act on the vital lessons which Gandhi, Tolstoy and these other prophets of nonviolence teach us?'

Among those participating in our Gandhi Foundation peace event were Bhikkhu Nagase, the Japanese Buddhist monk who, inspired by Nichidatsu Fuji, a venerable Japanese Buddhist friend of Gandhi and a long-time campaigner for world peace, founded the Battersea Peace Pagoda, and Sister Marutasan of the Milton Keynes Peace Pagoda. Both are welcome friends of and participants in our Golders Green Unitarians peace services.

Feargus was touched to be presented with a beautifully illustrated edition, with Japanese calligraphy, of a parable written by Leo Tolstoy, *Kunala's Eyes*. Based on a traditional Buddhist text, it tells the story of a son of the Indian Buddhist Emperor Ashoka, a military conqueror who, in repentance for the many deaths he had caused on the battlefields, embraced Buddhism and strove for peace and the welfare of people and animals alike. It is a deeply moving story of forgiveness and compassion.

Others who contributed were Dr Saara Majid, a Muslim Sufi singer, her choir, musicians playing Indian raga music, Riky Choudhuri, another Classical Indian musician, and Asha Buch, a Jain Gandhian, who delivered from India on Zoom a beautiful Jain prayer fully in the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi himself.

Among those following the event on Zoom were several people living in India and the United States.

A voluntary collection was taken at this interfaith gathering, attended by Jains, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Sikhs, Quakers and Unitarians, for the British Red Cross Ukraine Crisis Appeal and this constituted the inaugural appeal of our new British Red Cross fund honouring Gandhi and Tolstoy. £570 was raised and additional donations of £539 brought the total up to £1109.

Accompanied by Bhikkhu Nagase and Sister Marutasan, Feargus attended another commemoration ceremony at the statue of Gandhi in Parliament Square at which the Indian and Bangladeshi High Commissioners, MPs and peers from all the main political parties and representatives of various faith traditions made speeches and laid wreaths in memory of Gandhi's nonviolent struggle for the freedom of India and global peace.

Feargus laid rose petals by Gandhi's statue on behalf of the Gandhi Foundation and our Unitarian Peace Fellowship in thanksgiving for a courageous peace witness which cost him his life: a fate shared by that other martyr for freedom, peace and reconciliation, Dr Martin Luther King, whom the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi so profoundly moved and inspired.

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### **The evil and danger of nuclear weapons by Feargus O'Connor**

Pope Francis, himself the leader of a global religious community of over 1 billion believers, has shown commendable moral leadership in not only warning about the 'catastrophic humanitarian and environmental effects' of nuclear war and the very real risk of accidental detonation but also asserting that 'the threat of their use as well as their very possession is to be firmly condemned'. Quakers have shown equal moral leadership in

declaring that 'nuclear weapons are morally and ethically unacceptable'.

In our 1982 GA resolution, we UK Unitarians made our own moral and religious convictions clear: that we 'regard the use and threatened use of nuclear weapons as morally and spiritually indefensible'. This grave warning was reaffirmed in our 2018 General Assembly resolution, moved by me and seconded by Rev. John Carter, Chair of our Unitarian Peace Fellowship.

If we are to be true to our word urgent action is needed now.

Those of us of old enough may recall past pronouncements by politicians which were evidence of criminal insanity reminiscent of the surreal satire *Dr Strangelove*. You may remember that a former Prime Minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, declared, 'The British people are prepared if necessary to be blown to atomic dust.' Or you may recall these words of Richard Nixon before he left office in disgrace under the threat of impeachment. 'I can go into my office, pick up the telephone, and in 25 minutes 70 million people will be dead.'

In the face of such criminal insanity I agree with the late great American satirical writer Kurt Vonnegut, an avowed Humanist with Unitarian Universalist ties, that the determined women Greenham Common anti-nuclear campaigners and Trident Ploughshare peace activists in Scotland witnessing against such follies are 'the shock troops of the sane in the war against insanity'.

A single Trident warhead can produce temperatures of tens of millions of degrees Centigrade and shock waves sufficient to flatten skyscrapers within 500 metres of the blast. At a distance of 2 kilometres the blast is sufficient to bring down buildings and 4 kilometres from an exploding Trident warhead the heat can set newspapers on fire. The explosion of several of these deadly



nuclear bombs can cause immeasurable damage to the entire ecosystem supporting all life on this planet. All-out nuclear war of course may wipe out all life on Earth.

In 1968 the UK co-drafted and signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Article 6 commits us to undertake to 'pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control'.

Do we as responsible citizens not have a moral responsibility to remind our political leaders of the words of the Nuremberg Tribunal that 'crimes against International Law are committed by men, not by abstract entities' and those of Sir Hartley Shawcross, the UK Prosecutor at Nuremberg, that 'murder does not cease to be murder merely because the victims are multiplied ten million fold'.

Rev. Norman Shanks, a leading figure in the World Council of Churches, respected former convenor of the Church and Nation Committee of the Church of Scotland and leader of the Iona Community, once declared that these weapons of mass destruction are 'theologically and morally indefensible, strategically irrelevant, illegal in terms of international law, and a colossal waste of resources that could be creatively used for the common good'.

But it is not only legal and religious testimony that should inspire us in our witness against these weapons of mass destruction threatening the lives of millions and environmental harm on an incalculable scale. General Lee Butler, a former Commander in Chief of the US Strategic Command, asserted that 'nuclear weapons are the enemy of humanity... biological time bombs whose effects transcend time and space, poisoning the earth and its inhabitants for generations to come'.

I conclude with the considered testimony of a former Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Louis Mountbatten of Burma. Shortly before his death in 1979 he gave a speech in which he spoke up for humanity and sanity. He said, "As a military man who has given half a century of active service, I say in all sincerity that the nuclear arms race has no military purpose. Wars cannot be fought with nuclear weapons. Their existence only adds to our perils because of the illusions which they have generated.... When I was Chief of the British Defence Staff, I made my views known.... I can see no use for any nuclear weapons which would not end in escalation, with consequences that no one can conceive."

I therefore considered it a moral and indeed a religious duty to propose that 2018 General Assembly motion in the spirit of Lord Mountbatten and the religious and legal critics of the evil of nuclear weapons. In doing so John Carter and I honoured the example of Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein, Albert Schweitzer and all the other courageous humanitarian campaigners, particularly the Quakers, who have spoken out and devoted their lives to securing a world free of the evil of nuclear weapons.



(image by Pixabay)



## Unitarian Peace Fellowship Vision



The Unitarian Peace Fellowship was founded in 1916 in the darkest days of the First World War to witness for peace and against the futility of war. Today we maintain that witness. Our vision includes the ethos and values of the Charter for Compassion. The surest route to peace is through the compassion of human beings for each other and for all living things. We support and encourage Unitarians in their witness for Peace and Compassion locally, nationally, and internationally.

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