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NEWS & VIEWS

GLASGOW UNITARIANS - OCTOBER 2017

*'The Autumn leaves that jewel the ground
They know the art of dying
And leave with joy, their glad, gold hearts
In the scarlet shadows lying.'*

*Robin Williamson - Incredible String Band
from 'October Song'*



OCTOBER

The trees do not stir beneath the rain.
Your eyes are loosed, the world is glossed,
all is quiet save for this refrain of luminous
drops through the green grass, the leaves.
The very air has quietened the world
through which you stare.

Another month, some sunny days and
still the world in subtle change
darks down at dusk to bring the wind
that flies the flowers depleted stalks.
You know that skies now hold the heft
of sharpened sigh's suspense above
at weightless snows, the world baulks.
It's Winter's threat but cosy, curled inside
we brave the coming yet.

Corinna Tyagi

CHURCH NEWS

BRING & SHARE LUNCHES

It is our custom to provide a 'finger buffet' lunch when we have a visiting speaker. Unusually, we are planning two, on the first two Sundays in October. If you have time, the lunch affords an opportunity to get to know each other, and the visitors, a bit better.

FOOD BANK COLLECTION

On October 15th, Ruth Gregory's theme will be connected with Harvest-time, so we'll be having a collection, not of fruit and vegetables, but of non-perishable items for the Govan Community Food Bank. I asked Owen Fenn, who runs it, what are the most useful offerings, and was a bit surprised to learn that they are Baby food and nappies, Rice, Lentils and Pasta, and Toiletries, especially women's sanitary products. If that sounds a bit dull, I'm sure tasty canned or bottled items are appreciated, too. And I'll devote the coffee-collection to the same cause.

HALLOWE'EN

October ends with Samhain, the pre-Christian festival that marks when the 'veil' between the living and the dead is supposed to be most easily breached. The night when the spirits walk abroad is followed by All Saints Day, or the Day of the Dead as it is variously called in other countries. It does us no harm to reflect on what we owe to our recently, or long-dead ancestors, and perhaps to take a look at old photographs and remember them. No, we aren't planning a Hallowe'en party. We don't do Trick or Treat. But you can come in fancy dress any time you like.

A CHURCH EMPLOYEE

At the AGM the question of a Minister was raised. It is likely that there will be a discussion meeting for members, an EGM, sometime in November. If a proposal emerges, a vote will be taken at a later date, when as many members as possible have had time to mull over the pros and cons.

SCOTTISH UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

Iain Brown and I are this year's Glasgow representatives on the SUA 'executive' committee, and we met in Dundee in mid-September. Dundee church has attracted the part time Ministry of Rev Dr Rob Whiteman and the congregation is starting to grow again, supported by worship leaders from the three other Scottish churches. Rob is also newly a member of the Executive Committee of the General Assembly. Aberdeen church now has a part-time minister, Aberdonian Rev Caroline Cormack who is an Interfaith Minister and is undergoing training to be a Unitarian one. Edinburgh currently has no Minister, and is of the opinion that it, too will have to seek someone part-time.

The SUA's AGM used to take place over a weekend, historically in various Youth Hostels, most recently at Churches House, Dunblane. But as our congregations age, and fail to attract new younger members, it has dwindled to a Saturday meeting, notionally held in each Scottish church in rotation. This year it was in Edinburgh. Next year it will be in Glasgow, on Saturday 12th May. The AGM will be in the morning, followed by a catered finger buffet. In the afternoon there will be an outside speaker, followed by an anniversary service, hopefully led by the new (2018-19) President of the General Assembly – of Unitarian and Free Christian churches. We hope it will be well supported locally.

A NEW LECTERN

At two successive AGMs, there has been a call for a new lectern to replace the existing one, the height of which is adjusted by standing it on one or two big old Bibles. Considerable committee time has been spent discussing this, and searching the internet for an adjustable, table-mounted replacement that would look nice on the existing desk. We don't have space for a free-standing reading-desk.

Our worship room is well served by a broad desk in the middle of the acoustic arc formed by the curved wall. Were our numbers to double, we might have to think again, but at the moment the current arrangement of seating is comfortable and tends to disguise an occasional shortage of worshipers. It would be almost ideal, if only regular members would remember to leave some seats near the entrance vacant for late-comers and strangers.

The truth is that worship leaders are agreed that the present arrangement suits them very well. It can easily be adapted to accommodate a laptop computer. The big desk hides the speaker's legs, and the shelves underneath house a pair of hymn books plus equipment for the audio-loop and a box of spare candles, as well as having space for one or more large Bibles. The Bibles serve as a tangible reminder that contemporary Unitarian thinking is built on a Judeo-Christian foundation. And the desk-top is a convenient place to lay down papers or other books which may be used in the service.

WHAT MIGHT A MINISTER BRING?

Our Unitarian church is currently organised by the Trustees who are its Management Committee, assisted by various sub-committees. All members of these committees are volunteers, with no more entitlement or rights than any other member. The only difference is that they are able to give up the time, thought and effort needed to 'keep the show on the road'. I came across this phrase while reading one night; * "*....committees that are paralysed by the clamour of dissent, and the dead hand of caution.*" If this is how our church committees are viewed by our members, no wonder members want a Minister – a visible, acknowledged Leader who takes responsibility, so that members don't have to.

Priests / Ministers in most Christian churches are supported by hierarchy and centuries of dogma, history and practice, all symbolised in ceremonial trappings and garments. Unitarianism does not have such tradition. It is much more demanding. We put our faith in the ministry of us all. Each church is autonomous, to suit the inclinations of the members, who are responsible for its conduct and assets. Although we have some trained Unitarian Ministers, they are encouraged to forge their own style of ministry – in other words, left to their own devices by the General Assembly, to sink or swim as best they can, hopefully with the support of their congregation.

While we might wearily wish for a leader who might be a well-spring of ideas and initiatives, bursting with energy and non-judgmental love – the Jesus of so many hymns – our faith teaches us to strive to become that paragon. We

would want such a leader to be our ambassador in the city, our wordsmith and publicist; to what end, unless we are co-workers, active in each initiative?

S/he could be a magnet for the missing younger generations. Do we value young people, and take an interest when they come to us, or do we just talk to our usual companions? Do we plan events for them? Do we offer to help them? It behoves us to find ways to include them, and to arrange situations where they feel valued. Perhaps, for example we could consider employing a trained childcare worker to run an advertised crèche for a couple of hours each week, in conjunction with a church member or parent.

Still more urgently, we need to employ someone to relieve Trustees of some of the burden of running our Centre and managing its many users, so that it is safe and comfortable for all of us.

Janet Briggs

* *Louis de Bernieres, 'Birds Without Wings'*

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS SENSITIVITIES

Thanks to Iain Brown's Inter-Faith connections, he and I attended a course for Local Authority Workers to make them aware of, and help them understand some of the sensitivities and assumptions they might encounter, occasioned by our increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-cultural population. It was led by Farkhanda Chaudry, Inter-Faith Office for East Renfrewshire Council, and was attended by Social Workers from across the West of Scotland. All of them were younger than us, which I found delightful, and many had relatively recent immigrant connections, which helped to make it more lively. Farkhanda herself has travelled widely, and worked abroad, so she has a fund of interesting insights.

She had attended the course in Europe, where it was developed, and had condensed the week-long material into a two-day crash course, realising that the target group would have great difficulty in obtaining permission for five days of training. Indeed, some members had to arrive late, or leave early to

attend important meetings at their places of work. There were many different topics. We were not encouraged to take notes.

Much of the teaching was done in 'games' – group activities such as rummaging through photos, to pick out a couple, and talk about your personal reaction to them. In another one, cards depicting the names, sources, main messages and symbols of maybe ten major religions were spread on a table. Groups were told to assemble these in chronological order. Long-life and Unitarianism made me an unlikely authority here. In another one, we were given a questionnaire, to fill in answers to questions about our own religious development from childhood. We were not asked to share the written answers, but the ensuing (guided) conversation was made fascinating by Asta who grew up in Lithuania with no religious influence at all – a relic of the Soviet era. She was wonderfully outspoken and direct in her thinking.

There was some role-playing, too. You would have enjoyed watching Iain as the narrow-minded Catholic father of 23-year-old Jemima, who announced at the family dinner table, that she wanted to leave home and set up a flat in town with her (hitherto unannounced) boyfriend Nasim.

In another one, the spectacle wearers were chosen to bully and threaten the rest. I am so devoted to the underdog that I sat there paralysed. One of the victims commented that she spotted my reluctance, and saw me as a weak spot through whom an appeal might be made. Thus we learn about ourselves.

In the final afternoon, Farkhanda asked us to consider three big problems in contemporary society, namely Islamophobia, Antisemitism and Sectarianism – West of Scotland style. On a large sheet, we were to write all the bad things we had heard of, or heard said followed by all the positive, hopeful things likewise. I found it liberating to articulate the prejudices I have grown up among. It was like lancing a boil. So much for political correctness!

Janet Briggs

"When you drink the water, remember the spring." Chinese Proverb

CAFÉ WALDLUFT

In the mountains of Berchtesgarden, close to where Hitler had his mountain retreat, a small guest-house known as Café Waldluft is home to a handful of Germany's Asylum Seekers. With some help from the local village women the widowed owner runs the establishment as she always did, for the seventeen men and boys who have been drafted there to await a decision on their Asylum applications. They have no hope of moving on until their papers have been processed. She is no longer able to take in paying guests, and can only offer coffee to passers-by, because all her rooms are occupied.

'Mama' as they call her serves up the local produce as she has always done, but has learned to avoid the pork and alcohol proscribed for her Muslim residents. She patiently teaches them simple German, listens to their sorrows, and helps them fill out their official forms. And we saw her blessing the corridors of the house and all its residents with incense and a bell, as she has always done.

She tells us that some of the villagers probably saw their first coloured people when she opened her doors to them. Predictably, the change was not popular, but they will get used to it. We eavesdropped on them chuntering in the pub about how they would be strict with the newcomers, who seem to 'get everything'. Where have we heard that?

We heard the story of a Syrian, who was imprisoned and tortured for taking part in a protest rally, now desperately hoping that his wife and four children can join him. And we met a man from Sierra Leone who has travelled to Germany hoping he can study and go to University to train in some medical discipline so that he can go back and improve conditions there.

All of the men are homesick for their own families and countries. But they get along well enough, and they are appreciative of the lovely countryside, and the courtesy they are shown. Sadly, this year Mama has had to lose most of the residents, because she can't afford to upgrade the building to comply with the 2017 Fire Regulations. How the World has moved on!

Thanks to 'Witness' on Al Jazeera, 21.9.17

WHY ENGLISH IS SO HARD

We'll begin with a box, and the plural is boxes,
But the plural of ox becomes oxen, not oxes.
One fowl is a goose, but two are called geese,
Yet the plural of moose should never be meese.
You may find a lone mouse or a nest full of mice,
Yet the plural of house is houses, not hice.

If the plural of man is always called men,
Why shouldn't the plural of pan be called pen?
If I speak of my foot and show you my feet,
And I give you a boot, would a pair be called beet?
If one is a tooth and a whole set are teeth,
Why shouldn't the plural of booth be called beeth?

Then one may be that, and three would be those,
Yet hat in the plural would never be hose,
And the plural of cat is cats, not cose.
We speak of a brother and also of brethren,
But though we say mother, we never say methren.
Then the masculine pronouns are he, his and him,
But imagine the feminine: she, shis and shim!

 /grammarly

-ANONYMOUS

Contributed by Lyanne Mitchell.

PERSONNEL

MINISTER EMERITUS – Rev. John Clifford

LAY PREACHER – Iain Brown

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OCTOBER DIARY

SERVICES at 11am

MUSIC

Oct. 1 st Joan Cook "To Be a Pilgrim"	Stephen Bostock
8 th Jon Cape "Earthrise"	John Lowrie
15 th Ruth Gregory "What is Your Harvest?"	Paola Filippi
22 nd Iain Brown "Ancient Voices for a Post-Christian Era"	Edith Fleming
29 th Neelam Bakshi	John Lowrie

OTHER EVENTS

- Oct. 1st Bring & Share Lunch
- 8th Bring & Share Lunch
Management Committee 2.15 pm
- 15th Collection for a Food Bank
- 16th Trustees' Discussion at 11.15 am
Ministry sub-committee at 2.15 pm
- OWW October 7th and 21st in Mitchell Café at 10.30

FLOWERS and COFFEE

- 1st Jane and Norman
- 8th Margaret and George
- 15th Janet Briggs
- 22nd Wilma and Douglas
- 29th Janet Briggs