CORONAVIRUS – Covid-19

In line with Government guidelines we are suspending worship services and all other group meetings at the church. The last service was on March 15th.

We shall of course resume activities when it is safe to do so. We hope to keep in touch through our normal friendship and pastoral links and with regular news of our activities – such as they are at this difficult time.

Whilst congregating for worship and fellowship is central to being Unitarian – and indeed being human, we can in ‘isolation’ still give time to the spiritual and reflective side of our existence. Now is perhaps as good a time as any to think how we might be more mindful of our ‘Everyday Spiritual Practice’ (the title of our recent RE course). There is no limit to what your ESP might be – it is that through which you can spiritually examine, shape and care for your life, to achieve wholeness, satisfaction, depth and meaning.

Some people will miss the gathering together for worship. We can’t entirely replicate this online, but you will find some Unitarian churches offering online worship – some pointers where to search on Page 3.

Yorkshire Unitarian Union at Bradford

Bradford Unitarians hosted the Yorkshire Unitarian Union (YUU) spring gathering on the 7 March. Stephanie, our student minister, led a welcoming opening devotion and then the business of the day began with the President, Christine Dawson, telling us about the work of the Executive Committee. There was some focus on the planning for the summer (Scarborough) and autumn (York) gatherings and the grants available to individuals for attending Unitarian courses.

This year there are four motions for debate at the General Assembly Annual Meetings. These were discussed in some depth. This gave delegates and others who will be attending the meetings in Birmingham a chance to hear how people in the YUU are responding to these motions and how that might be reflected in their vote on the day. This was also an opportunity for those not attending – the majority – to have a voice on issues that are important to the wider Unitarian community. (NB GA Meetings now cancelled)

After a splendid lunch Helen Mason, our invited speaker, who is the Unitarian College Director, took the meeting through the work of the college. Helen has a way of not just informing but inspiring people.

The College’s foundational function, as the successor to Unitarian College Manchester, is ministerial training; but the range is now expanding to include worship studies courses, officer training courses and some of the activities previously provided by the Youth Programme. Some courses may be online. The college has also been working with the GA to develop courses for families with young children. These are marketed as ‘Unifest’. A Unifest Weekend was held at the Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow last October.

Stephanie brought the business of the day to a close with a quiet period of reflection. This was followed by light refreshments to help people on their homeward journey.

To sum up - the whole day was informative, friendly and a good occasion to catch up with friends and new people from our other churches in our district.

Jimmy Timiney
Stephanie’s Letter

It’s hard to believe I’m already writing my last newsletter contribution as student minister at Bradford. In my six months here I’ve seen the church buzzing with activity at times – like the Christmas Carol service, meal and games afternoon and the Yorkshire Unitarian Union spring event – and more recently experienced a much more subdued – though still joyful – gathering as a dozen intrepid souls spread out at a distance from each other attempting to observe the advised anti-virus precautions during Rev John Midgley’s delightful service celebrating some important anniversaries (including the centenary of Rupert the Bear). It’s been a busy time, and a strange one, but what shines through all of it is the warmth and community spirit the Bradford congregation brings to everything it does.

For those who haven’t yet experienced the new format of Food for Thought, the themed sessions give everyone a chance to bring in a short reading or two on a chosen theme, and we have enjoyed an enormous variety of thoughtful, insightful and funny pieces on the themes of Love (in February) and Spring (in March), followed of course by food and fellowship, two things at which this congregation excels.

I have been lucky that my six months here has included being able to attend your Annual General Meeting and hear thanks being given to all the people who contribute so much to keeping the chapel in good order and its activities running, from setting up the room to arranging boiler repairs and lettings, from providing flowers and music to arranging children’s activities. All our congregations are heavily reliant on the activities of volunteers and we are truly blessed to have such skilled and committed people. Many of you have been kind enough, in addition to all your usual activities, to take time to provide written feedback on a worship assignment I carried out as part of my academic studies at Luther King House, and on the RE course I led as part of my work for Unitarian College, for which I am very grateful.

It was a pleasure to have a visit recently from Michael Dadson as my placement assessor and Helen Mason as Director of Unitarian College, and to have the opportunity in our Sunday service to share with them, as well as with the congregation, some of the highlights of my time at FUSE (the Festival of Unitarians in the South East) and the Art of Hosting training organised by the General Assembly at Westbrooke College, Birmingham. This included the poetry of Kathleen Raine, an exercise in appreciation, and a number of models for helping to understand change.

On the Saturday, Helen led the gathered YUU members in an exercise familiar to current ministry students: writing a short (index card) personal Credo, or statement of belief. Each time we are asked to do this, my statement is a little different, as you might expect in a faith tradition which emphasises the continuing journey of discovery, yet each time the core remains the same: though each of us has ultimate responsibility for our own lives, choices and beliefs, we are always stronger when we share the process of discovery with a loving community.

Thank you for allowing me, for this short time, to be part of your fellowship.

Ed. Thanks Stephanie for your work with us – we have been enriched by your presence. A ‘scruffy’ ending thanks to the virus – we’ll try to put that right later.

Ann and Seth Jenkinson have been members here for a number of years – and a delight in their commitment and generosity. Now they are on the move. Ann writes:

We may have moved by the time services at Bradford resume but we shall call in occasionally to see everyone. One of the things we shall miss about Bradford is the warmth that has been shown to us by Bradford Unitarians.

Our new house is 45 mins from Hucklow so we hope that people will call in and see us if they are in the vicinity.

Best wishes to everyone.

Ann & Seth
Exploring Unitarianism and Unitarian Worship online

If you have access to the internet you have access to a wide range of Unitarian thought, worship, activities – our temporary closure could be a good time to explore this wider landscape.

You could start with:

www.ukunitarian.tv

Here you will find a lot of video material including many complete services. You could start by clicking on ‘services’ and scrolling down to Bradford Unitarians and recall the time that UK Unitarian TV recorded worship at Bradford.

Your second port of call could be the web site of the National Unitarian Fellowship (NUF):

www.nufonline.org.uk

Again a lot of video material – particularly interesting are the short interviews with Unitarians across the UK, and meditations/reflections. You will find many of these – a nice one by John Midgley.

Some Unitarian churches are responding to the current situation by posting short online worship. I don’t have a full list of these churches, but have a look at Sevenoaks:

www.sevenoaksunitarians.org

and Cross Street, Manchester:

www.cross-street-chapel.org.uk

Most Unitarian churches have a website – naturally they vary in quality, focus and updatedness, but many will have their newsletter and sometimes recent sermons.

How about going international! The Unitarian Universalist Association of America is a bigger and better resourced organisation than our General Assembly and their web site reflects this. So go to

www.uua.org

There are inspiring words on the home page. Pick out a congregation, look at their website, see what they do...in worship, social justice....how they let their hair down! Many worship leaders in the UK use the UUA ‘Worship Web’ for their worship material. This is accessed via the main UUA site – there is an amazing amount of material...enjoy exploring this.

Hope that the above pointers lead you to some interesting places and that you are enriched and made even more inquisitive by the experience.

This is not second-best to physically meeting for worship – it’s just a widening of horizons – which is usually a good thing.

Life goes on...

My garden and the natural world in general have not heard of the Corona Virus. The snowdrops and hellebores appeared in January followed by the witch hazel, crocus and forsythia. Daffodils, hyacinths and kerria are now in flower. We were late in seeing our first lamb this year – but we’ve now seen plenty – they seem cheerful enough! As I write this we have a warm sunny day in the middle of March – who would not be optimistic on such a day. Yes, we have a serious public health issue and we must be cautious and careful for ourselves, our families, and those around us; but we should still be in awe of the miracle of springtime.

At a recent Food for Thought we reflected on spring ending with Roger McGough’s splendid poem The Fight of the Year. This starts:

And there goes the bell for the third month and Winter comes out of its corner looking groggy.
Spring leads with a left to the head followed by a sharp right to the body.

McGough then lists all the new growth in flowers and animals with an increasing tempo and intensity as time moves on...ending:

Tomatoes...radish...cucumber...onions...beetroot...celery...and any amount of lettuce for dinner, Winter’s out for the count – Spring is the winner!

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I hope to produce another Newsletter for June and July. Contributions please by May 17th 2020
With Worship Services and other events temporarily suspended there is no need for a calendar. In place of that I am adding some short sequences of worship which you may wish to use from time to time. Take your time – read slowly – pause – add ‘thoughts’ if you wish – use flexibly.

**Worship Sequence 1**

**Words for settling:** We come as we are to worship and pray, Unsure of ourselves, unsure what to say. O may we be patient and willing to be Receptive and open to hear and to see

Bruce Findlow (Hymns for Living No. 28)

**Chalice (candle) lighting:** To face the world’s coldness – a chalice of warmth. To face the world’s terrors – a chalice of courage. To face the world’s turmoil – a chalice of peace. May its glow fill our spirits, our hearts, and our lives.

Lindsay Bates (Rejoice Together)

**Prayer/Reflection:** When so much of the world seems to be filled with bitterness and hate – help us to conquer anger with love. When those with power so often act unjustly, destroying lives in the process – help us to conquer evil with good. When greed and consumerism seem to dominate the world – help us to conquer selfishness with generosity. When facts are so often distorted at the expense of others – help us to conquer lies with the truth.

Roger Courtney (Gathering in Prayer)

**Open Time:** perhaps some silence, express a personal concern or remember someone in need. Now would be a good time, if you wish, to play some quiet music for a few minutes.

**Closing Words:** Take courage, the way is often hard, the path is never clear, and the stakes are very high. Take courage, for deep down there is another truth: you are not alone.

Wayne Arnason (Rejoice Together)

**Worship Sequence 2**

**Words for Settling:** From all the fret and fever of the day, let there be moments when we turn away, and, deaf to all confusing outer din, intently listen for the voice within.

Monroe Beardsley (Hymns for Living No. 48)

**Chalice (candle) lighting:** May the light we now kindle inspire us to use our powers to heal and not to harm, to help and not to hinder, to bless and not to curse, to serve Thee in the spirit of freedom

From the Jewish Tradition

**Reflection:** Words tell us our thoughts; silence helps us hear our deeper feelings. In silence, we sense the rhythmic measures of all life, in the slow repetitive rhythm of our own bodies. In silence, we feel the ebb and flow of life’s breath as the waves of the larger ocean in which we all live. In silence, we sense a larger spiritual presence of which we are all a part. In silence, we sense the coming and going of human pathways, knowing we can ask no more than to have reached out to others in creative and caring ways. And in this silence, we know it is the human touch that gives the larger journey its meaning.

Edwin C Lynn (Rejoice Together)

**Open Time:** your choice: silence, music, expressing a joy or a concern, remembering someone.

**Closing Words:** Where there is faith there is love, where there is love here is peace, Where there is peace there is blessing, where there is blessing there is God. Where there is God – there is no need.

Translation of Hungarian words