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GLASGOW UNITARIANS

JANUARY 2021

NEWS & VIEWS



*Spirit of truth
and love*

*Life-giving
holy dove*

*Speed forth
thy light:*

*Move on the
waters' face*

*Bearing the
lamp of grace*

*And in earth's
darkest place*

*Let there
be light!*

*From John Marriott
Hymn 114
Hymns for Living*



GLASGOW UNITARIAN CHURCH (SCIO)

72 Berkeley Street, Glasgow G3 7DS Scottish Charity Number SC016472

Cover - Lyanne Mitchell

Meetings in January via Zoom

Jan 3rd – **Sunday Service** with Rev John Clifford, **Hellos and Goodbyes**—It's not just years that have beginnings and endings—**7pm**

Jan 17th – **Sunday Service** with Neil Spurway, **Unitarians Speaking of God:** discussing extracts from talks given in 2020 by four young ministers to the Unitarian Renewal Group—**7pm**

Jan 24th – **Burns Celebration** with Ruth Gregory and Alison Briggs at **2pm**

Jan 31st - **Engagement Session** with Barry Bell at **2pm** (See below)

Your Trustees and Ministry team have decided that we will offer something a little different to a traditional church service for our Zoom offerings whenever these are taking place on the fifth Sunday of a month.

I am pleased to offer the first of these, an Engagement session at 2pm on 31 January 2021 which will be open to all who know me and wish to come along. It will be somewhat along the lines of what I have done towards the end of my services for some years now, where I have invited those attending to engage with me and express “their thoughts” about the subjects raised in the service.

We will have a short period of simple welcoming of each other, and then begin our formal engagement session by considering the “Christmas wish” I expressed on Barbara’s Christmas service of 20 December 2020, which is printed elsewhere in this online magazine. [Page 5—Ed.] I hope you will read it, access the song referred to,

perhaps even engage directly with some of Richard Holloway’s other writings and broadcasts, and be moved to contribute within the engagement session.

If time permits, we should be able to cover other thoughts to be engaged with, and perhaps then move to a more chatty form – we’ll see how it goes.

I look forward to seeing you there.



Barry Bell

We have our regular **coffee mornings** on **Tuesdays at 11am** and **midweek meetings** on **Wednesdays at 7pm**—all currently on Zoom

Jan 6th—**Scottish Unitarian Association (SUA)** via Zoom

Jan 12th—Meeting of the **Management Committee** via Zoom at **7pm**

THE WEDNESDAY GROUP

keeping the church Zoom-connected during the pandemic



“Reality is for those who cannot face their dream” — Slavoj Žižek

In December Evy Yedd joined us from Glasgow’s Orthodox Jewish community. Her family came to Glasgow during the pogroms in nineteenth century Russia. Evy gave us an appreciation of the spiritual significance of Sabbath observance for Jews and a flavour of meetings in the synagogue. Evy said we would be welcome to visit the synagogue in future, when conditions are favourable. We are grateful for the time Evy shared with us and to Alison Spurway for arranging it; we are eager to maintain this contact.

We also welcomed Satya Dunning from Interfaith Glasgow who led us in a meditation, and consideration of movement and dance, combined with our own recollections of sports, with a particular focus on their sensual physicality. The other weeks we had a general discussion on Christmas and another quiz.

Jan 6th

New Year resolutions. Self-help book sales and (in normal times) gym memberships rise dramatically in January. Have you made/kept any resolutions? Are they a help or a hindrance?

Jan 13th

Bring your favourite fiction book. Is there a book you have returned to a few times? Why did you find it compelling and has your appreciation developed and changed?

Jan 20th

A full programme for the Wednesday evenings in January had not been agreed by the time of News and Views going to press. All who are interested are invited to make suggestions and/or lead meetings.

Jan 27th

To be arranged. Space to be filled by your imagination!

My Unitarian journey so far ...

... started on a shared taxi ride in Antwerp about 4 years ago now. Four of us were quite squashed in and tried to make this less awkward by means of animated conversation. Our fellow passengers on the way to dinner after a long day of listening to conference papers were religious studies scholars George and Margaret Chryssides. They suggested it might be an idea for us to explore Unitarianism, as a contrast to the Christian fundamentalist past we had left behind.

A couple of years passed, and we had not done anything about their suggestion. Deep down I felt I was done with organised religion for good. Then I had to spend a few weeks in hospital. In between hospital visits, Donald my husband started attending various religious services, as part of his research interest in small religions in Scotland. This is how he first came to attend a service at Glasgow Unitarians, and once I was recovering back home, I came along too.

Services at Glasgow Unitarians impressed us from the start with their intellectually stimulating content, presented by a refreshing variety of service leaders. We have been very happy to experience that a close and caring community can exist without dogmatic beliefs. For me personally, the new found freedom from the somehow menacing promise of salvation, which seemed to be dangling forever just out of reach or certainty, has been liberating.

As part of our Wednesday evening activities, we had many opportunities to experience and learn about an amazing variety of other religious groups and their beliefs and practices. A good thing to come out of the current pandemic has been meeting Unitarians from all over the UK, the US and Germany, and share in their online services and activities. This has added the nice warm feeling of being part of a large worldwide community on our Unitarian journey.



Ruth Jacobs

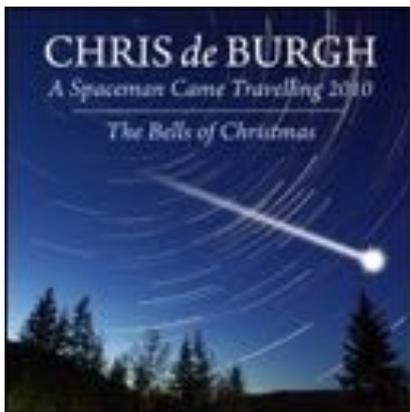
Christmas Wishes

I was very pleased that Barbara invited me to bring a “Christmas Wish” to her service of that name on 20 December 2020.

My Christmas wish is simple and very Unitarian – the hope that mankind may focus more on the core message of “goodwill to all” which lies at the heart of all faiths, and less on the potentially-divisive claimed truths which are also a part of all faiths.

I would like to share with you two very different things which help me to focus in this way. One is a slightly frivolous pop song which has stayed with me for more than 40 years. The other is a view of the nature of myth as “true fiction” which I found only recently through one of our Wednesday night Zoom meetings, and which I find profoundly helpful.

I simply cannot accept the whole “virgin birth” and “nativity story” thing as literal truth. In this, I share common ground with those who do not identify as Christian, with many Unitarians, and also with a pretty significant number of more traditional Christians including Richard Holloway and plenty other Christian ministers, vicars, and priests.



The pop song I referred to charted in 1975, is by Chris de Burgh, and is entitled “A Spaceman Came Travelling”. You’ll easily find it on Youtube and elsewhere, and it gives an alternative view of what may have been going on at the time of Jesus’ birth. It is a view which I find somewhat more credible than the one presented in the Gospels, and one which puts the simple message “goodwill to all men” at its centre.

Richard Holloway is a former Scottish Episcopal Bishop of Edinburgh. His contention in describing myths as “true fiction” is that all myths are stories containing eternal truths about the nature of being human, and that as such these stories become toxic whenever they are asserted in their entirety as literal and unquestionable truths.

This is both a very good explanation of the dangers of fundamentalism of all kinds, and a great help for me in living with Christmas.

The essential thing for me about Christmas, and indeed all religious festivals, is that they encourage mankind to get in touch with our better side, to express love for one another, to be together in beloved community, and to both give and receive goodwill.



As I said earlier, it is my Christmas wish that mankind may focus more on the core message of “goodwill to all” which lies at the heart of all faiths, and less on the potentially divisive claimed truths which are also a part of all faiths.

Barry Bell

The 'plague village' of Eyam, Derbyshire

On 1 November 1666 farm worker Abraham Morten gasped his final breath - the last of 260 people to die from bubonic plague in the remote Derbyshire village of Eyam. Their fate had been sealed four months earlier when the entire village made the remarkable decision to quarantine itself in an heroic attempt to halt the spread of the Great Plague. This is the story of the villagers who refused to run.

The story of the plague in Eyam had begun with the arrival of a bale of cloth sent from London, where the disease had already killed thousands of inhabitants.

Contained in the bale of damp cloth were fleas carrying the plague.

A tailor's assistant was said to have opened the bale and hung the cloth in front of the hearth to dry, unwittingly stirring the disease-ridden fleas contained within the parcel.

He became the first of the plague's victims in the village.

The plague swept through the community. Between September and December 1665, 42 villagers died and by the spring of 1666, many were on the verge of fleeing their homes and livelihoods to save themselves.

It was at this point that the newly appointed rector, William Mompesson, intervened. Believing it his duty to prevent the plague spreading to the nearby towns of Sheffield and Bakewell, he decided the village should be quarantined.

However, as if persuading his parishioners to sacrifice their lives was not difficult enough, he had another problem - he was already deeply unpopular with the villagers.

He had been sent to Eyam in April 1664 after the previous rector, Thomas Stanley, was



removed. Stanley had refused to acknowledge the 1662 Act of Uniformity, which made it compulsory to use the Book of Common Prayer, introduced by Charles II.

Stanley, along with the majority of people in Eyam, had been supporters of Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan government, prior to the restoration of the



William Mompesson

Puritan government, before the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

Mompesson, realising he would need help, decided to reach out to Stanley in the hope that he could persuade the villagers to carry out his plan.

Stanley was living in exile on the edge of the village, having been effectively kicked out. The parishioners didn't like, or trust, Mompesson, however, they agreed to meet.... and the plan they devised was remarkable.

On 24 June 1666, Mompesson told his parishioners that the village must be enclosed, with no-one allowed in or out.

He said the Earl of Devonshire, who lived nearby at Chatsworth, had offered to send food and supplies if the villagers agreed to be quarantined.

Mompesson said if they agreed to stay - effectively choosing death - he would do everything in his power to alleviate their suffering and remain with them, telling them he was willing to sacrifice his own life rather than see nearby communities decimated.

August 1666 saw the highest number of victims, reaching a peak of five or six deaths a day. The weather was remarkably hot that summer, which meant the fleas were more active, and the disease spread unchecked throughout the village.

Despite this, hardly anyone broke the cordon; even those who were reluctant to stay - saw it through.

During the outbreak, Eyam's mortality rate was higher than that suffered by the citizens of London as a result of the plague.

In just over a year, 260 of the village's inhabitants, from no fewer than 76 different families, had died. However, Mompesson knew his actions, and the courage of his parishioners, had probably saved thousands more.

They knew they were risking life and limb but they still agreed to do it.



Open air services were held. Families stood apart to avoid infection.

Elizabeth Hancock buried six of her children and her husband close to the family farm.

They had all perished in the space of just eight days.



Now, three and a half centuries later, the story of Eyam has an inescapable resonance for us as we mourn over 60,000 deaths from Covid 19 in our own country and millions more around the world. It is very moving to walk through Eyam today past the row of 'plague cottages' with plaques listing all the families who died. There was no NHS fighting for them - no vaccines - their courage was amazing.

Lyanne Mitchell

A Summary of the Unitarian Societies Day 21st November 2020 Held on Zoom

The day's programme was introduced by Liz Slade, Chief Executive Officer. She stated that the pandemic had afforded an opportunity to renew our sources of spiritual sustenance, by using this break with normal reality to generate a new future and explore how we can engage others. Four societies took part in what followed.

1) **Findhorn Unitarian Network** grew from the recognition that the aims of the Findhorn Community in Forres had much in common with Unitarianism. The daily spiritual practices include trying to live in co-operation and co-creation with nature, finding a sense of worth in what you are doing, even if the tasks are routine, prayer and meditation, going within yourself and trusting the guidance given by the still small voice within, accepting the injunction to "Be Still and know that I am God". There are 4 avenues open to those who wish to explore these ideas further:

a) **Take part in the monthly meditation Service**, exploring different types of meditation practice to find inner peace. These are led by Rev. Ralph Catts. The most recent one was a meditation on the 4 candles of Advent, Hope, Peace, Love and Joy on 12 Dec and repeated on 15th Dec. These will continue monthly and will be intimated in GUC HELLO. Email Ralph at last 48 hours in advance if you would like to take part in future services. Address is ralphunitarian@gmail.com .

b) **The Transformation Game**. A self-discovery experience played with others online over 2 days. Let Ralph know if you are interested in this. There is a cost involved.

c) **Attend Experience Week**, a residential week held at Findhorn with a group of fellow Unitarians. FUN is presently raising funds to be able to help with the cost. A date in 2021 will be re-arranged after Covid. This is a deeply restorative experience for most who attend.

d) **A six-day Retreat** on the island of Erraid, off Mull. To be arranged. There is an online arrangement for sharing experiences with previous attendees.

2) **Unitarian Renewal Group** was formed to promote the growth of Unitarianism. In order that Unitarianism should not become stagnant or stale, we must guard against failure to acknowledge new ideas of the Divine. We need a faith based on the sacredness of life and community, living with integrity. 4 speakers followed the introduction. These were Rev. Anthony Howe, Laura Dobson, Rev. Stephen Lingwood, and Rev. Bridget Spain. All four contributions were very interesting and I recommend that they could form the basis of congregational discussions or perhaps services at GUC in the future.

3) **The Unitarian Earth Spirit Network**: has a website and a Facebook page for intimating future Zoom meetings. The last meeting on 21st December celebrated the Winter Solstice. Tony spoke of the inspiration he had found within the writings of John Muir: God is imminent in nature. He went on to explain the importance of the various Celtic Festivals within the Wheel of the Year. There is an active Earth Spirit group in

Edinburgh led by Eli Roth. Details on St Mark's web-site. All are welcome to join their virtual meetings.

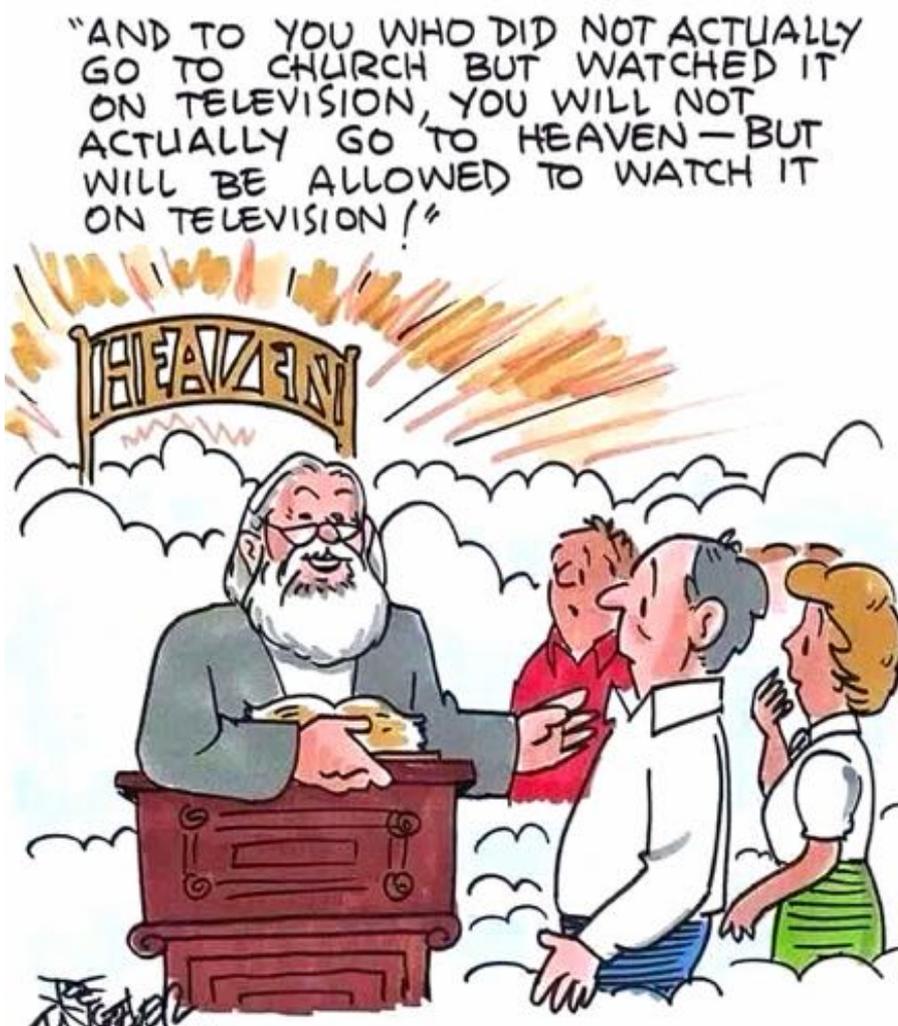
Monica Strell, an Interfaith minister serving Assynt in Sutherland, spoke of her work in her North Coast 500 ministry as she seeks to open up the connection between spirituality and nature in these beautiful surroundings. Her web-site is called "All the Colours of the North". She would make an interesting visiting speaker for GUC.

Janet Lithgow, from the Bolton Earth Spirit Group recounted the content of recent meetings of her group at Samhain. The Bolton and Edinburgh Groups would be useful and helpful contacts. Should we approach Linda Haggerstone to see if she would be interested in such a group for GUC?

4) **Unitarian Peace Fellowship**, formed in 1916. All religions to date have found reasons and justifications for war but we must LEARN from past mistakes. Suggestion is we focus on getting to know the "enemy" and concentrate on understanding the human values and feelings at work.

At present, peace is routinely sought by strengthening efforts to "keep the others out". This should be reversed. Rev. Celia Cartwright reminded us of the "Charter for Compassion". A suggestion was made that we should build up a video library. No details as to how to achieve this but would be something that the SUA or other District Associations could build up for the use of all IF THEY HAD A WEB-SITE. At present, Manchester is trialling such a web-site.

Ruth Gregory



Thanks to **Jim McKenna** for sending in the cartoon lampooning television church attenders. Who knew in 2020 most of us would be tuning into church via Zoom?

Robert Burns - 'The Tinder heart'



The best book I have read on Burns is *'The Tinder Heart'* by Hugh Douglas. The writer examines Burns' notorious relationships with women - not just to show that he was a lecher / seducer / Casanova / rake / and fornicator - which he was! - but to demonstrate the love and humanity beating in his ardent heart and discover the poetry and song which this inspired.

'The Tinder Heart' is a clever title with its double meaning - ie 'Tinder' being the Ayrshire dialect pronunciation of the word 'tender' and 'tinder' as in bursting into flames! Burns' heart was both.

(It was also a fatally weak heart, as it turned out.)

Although we know he was a seducer and notorious womanizer - he also had a tender heart and an ardent, passionate nature which regularly was set on fire.

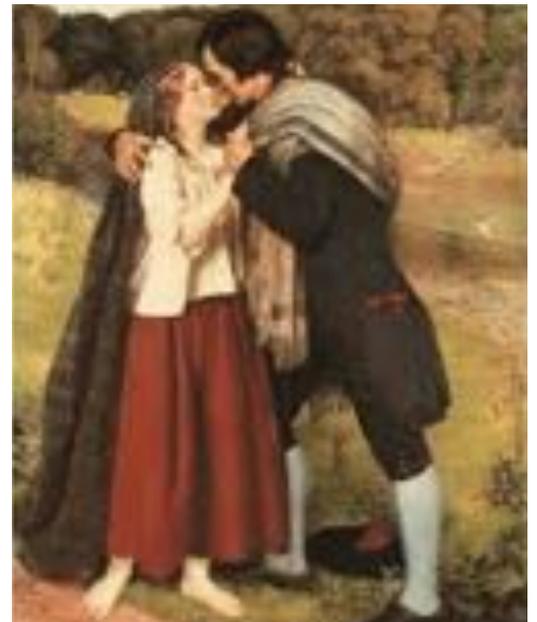
I love the slightly lesser known story behind the composition of *'To a Mouse'*. Robert was ploughing with his brother Gilbert, when the now famous field mouse's nest was destroyed. Mr Stewart pointed out to us that this must have been a very common experience in the life of any ploughman. However, Robert became very quiet and thoughtful after this 'common experience'. His brother noticed his change of mood and commented - "*Ach Rab, it was only a wee moose!*".

That evening, the family could hear Robert pacing back and forward upstairs until he came down and read his newly written poem to the family. Seemingly he turned to his brother and asked "Whit dae ye think of the wee moose noo?"

Burns never ceased to write poems and collect tunes for songs from boyhood in the fields at Mount Oliphant until his final days in Dumfries. From beginning to end, love and passion fired his muse. His songs and poems began with a lass... and ended with a lass.

I count myself to be very lucky. In Primary school I had a teacher, Mr Stewart, who loved Burns and took time to 'unpack' the Ayrshire dialect in his simpler poems, allowing us to appreciate and understand them on quite a deep level.

My teacher's enthusiasm was infectious - surely this is what makes a great teacher? I have remained 'infected' with love for Burns' work ever since. Thank you Mr Stewart!



Burns with 'Highland Mary'

Jessy Lewars, sister of his Excise colleague, nursed him as he was dying. Burns wrote one of his simplest, yet tenderest songs for her - *'O wert thou in the cauld blast'*

Jean Armour, his long suffering wife once said *'Oor Rab should have had twa wives'* (!) She must have understood his passion and could accept him for who he was. Jean's contribution was her quiet, constant support and home-making, which made his writing possible.

Burns was born on 25th January 1759 and died at the age of 36, in 1795. I have to wonder how on earth he found time to pack so much into his short, hard-working life!

Lynne Mitchell

Our Turkish Friends

Turkey was the home of the Ottoman Empire, which extended over the present-day Middle East. The First World War was initially a European war, except that several of the main protagonists drew on their overseas Empires of colonies to provide fighting men. The Ottomans chose to align with Germany, and so ended up on the losing side.

This created an opportunity to break from strict Islamic orthodoxy and move towards a more liberal European model, introducing Democracy. A young army officer, Mustafa Kemal Pasha rose to power and became known as Atatürk – ‘Father of the Turks’. He encouraged the wearing of European dress, and under his influence, the old Alphabet, based on the ancient Greek, was abandoned in favour of the Roman model, used in the West. Scientific education was encouraged so that Turks might reap the benefits of modern technologies ...

Predictably, the most rapid change took place in the main cities, and was regarded with suspicion in the country districts. Since Democracy has brought voting rights to all the people, the governing ideology has slipped back to the old Islamic way of living, which is more acceptable to the majority of people.



It must have been in the early 1940s that Fethullah Gülen was born. He went to University and became a serious thinker, Islamic scholar and University Professor. When it became clear that the educated classes were being regarded with suspicion, he advised graduates of the Universities to take their modern education and make their homes overseas, widening their knowledge and, in line with the teaching of the Koran, help to improve people's life chances, and help to make the World a better place.

Early in the 21st Century a wave of graduates and professionals left Turkey to settle in many countries, calling themselves Dialog4 the name of the Country. Naturally, they tend to keep in touch with each other, as friends and speakers of Turkish. Gülen himself relinquished his influential position – he might have become Prime Minister – and settled in America, where he still lives, though his health is failing. I believe it is he who has suggested to his followers that they might seek a friendly relationship with the Unitarians (UUs in the States), as being liberal religious people of similar sympathies. It is through our Inter-Faith connections with the Nurture Society that our periodic connections have grown.

A younger contender for the role of Prime Minister of Turkey was current President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He sees the educated class as a threat to his ambition, and since assuming office has arrested and imprisoned journalists, lawyers, engineers and teachers. In 2016 they got together and carried out a coup against Erdogan, which, though it resulted in the death of about 250 people, failed to attract popular support, and fizzled out. As a result, at least double that number were arrested and imprisoned. This year trials were held. Most of them were sentenced to life imprisonment.

Janet Briggs

Short Report on the Management Committee Meeting of 8th December



This meeting consisted mainly of following and monitoring the usual administrative procedures. It was agreed to circulate more widely notice of the course discussing leadership being offered by the GA in January and February. It was noted that due to a misunderstanding between Margaret Paxton and Iain Brown a report on Pastoral Care had not reached the Management Committee on this occasion. It was decided to re-send our letter to our principal tenant, Graeme Murray, by email, since it had not yet been replied to. Amendments had been made to the preaching schedule for January and these would be forwarded to News and Views for publication. Various expenditures on the maintenance of property were discussed and approved.

A report from Donald Jacobs as chair of the Publicity and Outreach Sub-Committee noted the coming withdrawal of central support for our website through the GA from John Wilkinson who, through Lyanne Mitchell, has served this congregation well. "We need to make swift plans to install and manage our own website." Alison Briggs has already gathered new material and formats for our own website using Wordpress templates suggested by Essex Hall. Donald reports that Janet, Lyanne and himself had worked well as a team in putting the new News and Views together.

Ruth Gregory, as Social Convenor, reported on some national events held on zoom for Unitarian Societies Day, covering the Findhorn Unitarian Network, the Unitarian Renewal Group, the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network and the Unitarian Peace Fellowship. [pp. 8-9—Ed.] Various matters were also discussed concerning the renewal of leases to tenants due to happen in January.

Iain Brown

From Traci Kirkland at the Govan Community Project

This is the film I tried to show when I came along to your [Wednesday evening] group to do a presentation, but the wifi was unforgiving that evening.

The resource is now live at the following link: <https://www.wejourneytogether.org.uk/>
We will also be offering a few familiarisation sessions in early 2021 and people can register their interest for these here: <https://forms.gle/HBNy6Y7Hg48XJv5e7>
Please feel free to share this resource widely with your contacts/networks.

I hope you are all well, and would like to thank you again for all your support and wish you all the best for the Festive Season.



Traci Kirkland
Head of Charity

T: 0141 445 3718 / M: 07443964017

www.govancommunityproject.org.uk

SOME READERS' COMMENTS

*This December edition tops the lot so far.
Thanks and Season's Greetings*

*I enjoyed the latest issue of N & V as I did the previous one-
both the articles and the illustrations.
Many thanks to all of you.*

I just read the November News & Views. Excellent.

*Wow, Lots of interest in there.
Liked your readings for the Interfaith Group meeting and
liked Clive Briggs' poem. Also Ian Brown's poem.
Laughed at the jokes. Enjoyed the sayings ... Thanks*

Thank you for the recent copy of the News and Views which I enjoyed reading. There was certainly plenty of variety and I enjoyed all the quotes but I noticed there was no back page with contact details of the Church Chair etc.

Thanks for the suggestion, we've included the personnel page again this month—Ed.

*I receive copies of many newsletters
from around the country, and yours is GOOD!
An excellent balance, I thought.
Best wishes for your future editions.*

*From the Editorial team - Thank you for your comments - they are much appreciated.
Please keep your contributions coming !
Best wishes from Janet, Donald and Lyanne*

Crucial Links

Zoom meetings for **Glasgow Unitarian Church (GUC)** can be accessed by the following means:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/5291141523?pwd=YjdhaFgxakY0TWJHWENZMW1PYjhoZz09>

Meeting ID: 529 114 1523

Passcode: 159

One tap mobile

[+441314601196,,5291141523#](https://zoom.us/j/5291141523?pwd=YjdhaFgxakY0TWJHWENZMW1PYjhoZz09) United Kingdom

Dial by your location

[+44 131 460 1196](https://zoom.us/j/5291141523?pwd=YjdhaFgxakY0TWJHWENZMW1PYjhoZz09) United Kingdom

Meeting ID: 529 114 1523

Find your local number: <https://zoom.us/u/atZ50GXWt>

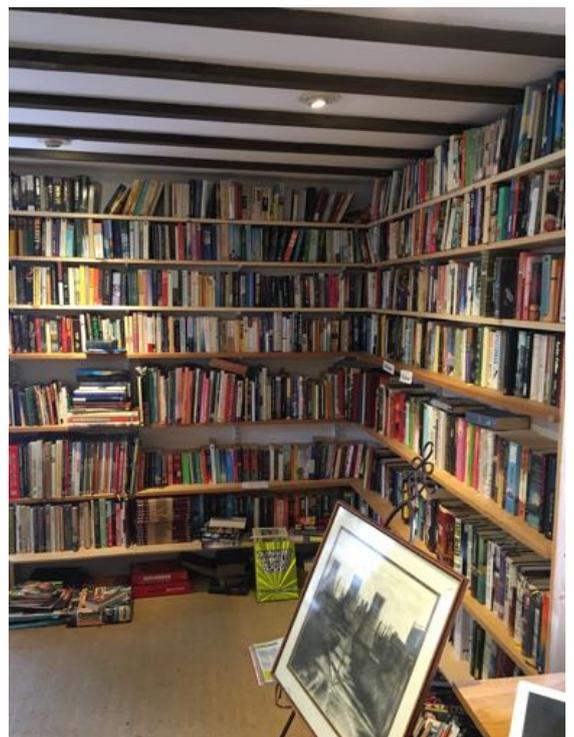
Over the past few months a number of our congregation have enjoyed Sunday services from **Saint Mark's the Unitarian Church in Edinburgh** where Rev. Peter Fairbrother serves as minister. If you want to join, tune in on Sundays at 11am at the following link. Services are followed by virtual teas and coffees, as a time for an informal chat, through a separate link provided in the chat facility at the end of the service.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/459569403>

Please send any submissions for February's News & Views to Janet, Donald or Lyanne by the middle of January.

Life observations from Donald ...

- **Unconfirmed reports suggest that everyone coming through John Lennon Airport will need to quarantine – Imagine all the people!**
- **Last week a book fell on my head, but I've got only my shelf to blame.**
- **Which reminds me of the time somebody asked why I was carrying a book that was five feet tall. I told them, "it's a long story."**
- **Indeed Groucho Marx claimed that, outside of a dog, books are man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read.**



PERSONNEL

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LAY PREACHER – Iain Brown

WORSHIP LEADERS - Barry Bell, Barbara Clifford, Rev. John Clifford, Roddy Macpherson, Jim Millar, Lyanne Mitchell and Alastair Moodie

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