



NEWSLETTER

Summer 2012

"supporting lay ministry in all its forms"



Issue 5

www.ualm.org.uk

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**UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION OF LAY MINISTRY
ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2012**

Friday 23rd – Sunday 25th November 2012

“NURTURING OURSELVES”

Lay ministry can be a tiring business, both physically and spiritually. So it is important that we learn to nurture ourselves, as well as other people.

At this year's conference we will be looking at various spiritual practices which can help us to look after ourselves as well as other people in our congregations. We will also be having our traditional Worship Studies Course slot on the Saturday afternoon, at which the WSC tutors and Administrator will be present.

The weekend begins on Friday with a buffet supper, and ends on Sunday with lunch after attending the service at Great Hucklow Unitarian Chapel.

Keep your eyes and e-mails open to spot the booking form, and send it to David Arthur as soon as possible!

Editor's Welcome

I am currently struggling with time. Now how's that for a daft sentence – show me a person who has enough time, and I'll show you either a liar or a layabout! However, the particular struggle I am having with time at the moment, is a feeling that it is in some sort of inexorable fast crawl.

Not making sense? No, I didn't think I was. What I mean is, only five years ago I did the Foundation stage of the Worship Studies Course, while pregnant / giving birth to Sophie (I was pregnant on the first Saturday, and brought two week old Sophie to the next Saturday a month later!); three and a half years ago I attended my first UALM conference while pregnant with Nathan, and now that little boy is about to start pre-school, and here I am about to start ministry training in September. (I'm glad to say, I'm not pregnant this time!)

As for it being a fast crawl – half of me is desperate for time to speed up so that I can get going with the training, as since learning that I had been accepted in January I have very much felt in some sort of limbo status. On the other hand, I'm begging it to slow down, as I've got so much to do before hand. Humm – subject material for a service here, on the mystery of time, maybe.

Anyway, one thing I have managed to do, I'm pleased to say, is put together this newsletter for you all, and huge thanks are due to all the contributors who have helped with this. It's always great fun seeing what articles have been sent, and piecing it altogether. In this Summer 2012 edition, we have for your delight some GA reports, a couple of Life Journeys, a story and a poem, a short sermon, and a consideration of the future direction of UALM itself, along with many other contributions. All of the articles are thought provoking, even challenging, and I hope you enjoy reading them, and maybe even feel inspired to respond. You never know – give me enough material, and I'll publish every three months, instead of only every six!

My love and best wishes to you all, and I look forward to seeing as many as possible of you at the UALM conference in @November.
Anna Jarvis

N.B. All views expressed in this newsletter represent those of their author, and not necessarily those of UALM.



President's Piece

Malcolm Sadler



Dear Friends,

I was so sorry not to be able to get to the General Assembly meetings at Keele, particularly as they were almost on my 'home territory', so to speak. I gather from news received from several folk who attended that they were very good indeed, and that I missed a 'treat'.

I am looking forward very much to meeting up with as many of you as possible in November at our Conference at Great Hucklow, which promises to be a very special event as usual, thanks to the sterling efforts of our Sue Woolley (where would we be without her?)

Writing this at the start of a sudden spell of hot weather certainly raises one's spirits, and I am certainly looking forward with enthusiasm to the promised special events, both Royal and National, which are just over the horizon. We always need to be looking forward, even if the Royal Celebrations inevitably will engage a wave of nostalgia.

I hope you all have a great Summer - here's to Autumn!

Malcolm

Report of GA meetings 2012

This year's Annual Meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches were held at the University of Keele in Staffordshire.

During the Anniversary Service, UALM members Kath Forder and Nicky Jenkins were added to the Roll of Lay Pastors, and UALM President Malcolm Sadler's retirement as Lay Leader of Banbury Unitarian Fellowship was also marked.

I was delighted that 45 people attended the UALM meeting, on the subject of the Worship Studies Course, which is reported elsewhere in this issue. I was particularly pleased that all three of the WSC tutors – Rev. Dr. Vernon Marshall, Rev. Alex Bradley and Rev. Ernest Baker – were there.

The four days of the meetings were the usual mix of business and worship and break-out meetings by all the Unitarian societies, and general good fellowship, which is the joy of being with many Unitarians in one place. Apart

from the UALM meeting (of course!), highlights for me included the John Relly Beard Lecture, delivered this year by Rev. Peter Owen-Jones, presenter of *Around the World in 80 Faiths*, in which he spoke about the importance of realising that we are all on this planet together, humans, animals and plants alike, and that there is a new spirituality emerging, which has at its core a creation-centred identity – “not to be perfect but to strive for wholeness and integration.”

Also the keynote speech by Paul Parker, Recording Clerk of Quakers in Britain (their equivalent of Derek McAuley) who spoke movingly about the future of liberal religions from a Quaker perspective. I would guess that most of those present identified strongly with the challenges he spoke about:

- To try to understand what is going on with our membership, in terms of age distribution etc
- Being confident about who we are and what we offer and being able to talk about it to others
- How to answer the question “I’m a Quaker [Unitarian] – ask me why” in language accessible to new people
- Living up to what we say and believe – putting our faith in to action
- How do people know we exist – how to raise visibility
- Making sure that people can find us and that they feel welcome when they do
- Being effective, vibrant communities
- Recognising the variety of ministries within the Quaker [Unitarian] community – acknowledging what people bring and the service they offer

It was also good to learn a little more about the new Strategic Groups: Ministry, Local Leadership and Visibility, and a new initiative, which was launched by Rev. Andy Pakula: the 2020 Unitarian Congregational Development Fund, which has grand plans for renewing existing congregations and planting new ones.

The food was good and the fellowship was better – what more could you ask?

Sue Woolley

My Unitarian Upbringing.

I can only assume that my father was the first Unitarian in our family, for mother was brought up as an Anglican, but they got married in Essex Church, Palace Gardens Terrace London which at one time was a very large red sandbrick building with a spire. This has now been demolished and the new Kensington Church built on its ground.

I can remember as a very young child being taken across the road to the Lindsey Theatre where we had Sunday school classes. After the war when my father came back, he became the Sunday School Superintendant and we

now met in the basement hall , which is where all our social events took place. It was here that I met my wife Phyllis when we were just 10 or 11 and things just developed over the years.

We had many happy times at the church with Spring Festivals, and sports days in Hackney Park, as well as swimming competitions at the York baths Bethnal Green. The London Sunday schools were very much a large family group and we were always at one or another's church for social evenings or Old Tyme dancing which took place at Kilburn, Quex Road church.

From the age of 21 I joined the RAF for my National Service, got married and the Unitarian church rather got left out of things as we had started a family and our nearest church was either Ilford or Southend, as we now lived in Romford, which was a long way to take the children and also we could not have afforded the fares.

When the children got older and were about to leave home we moved to Frimley in Surrey and some time after we found that there was a Unitarian Chapel in Godalming (Meadrow) which we joined and became part of their community, and felt as if we had never been anywhere else.

Then we moved to Crewkerne when I retired, and here I really feel as if I am doing something worth while, as I am now Secretary of the chapel and produce the News Letter, and since Phyllis passed on I have been taking services at our own chapel, as we have no minister, as well as spreading myself around the Western Union doing lay preaching from Bristol Frenchay to Plymouth Knotte Street and all chapels in between.

I have now completed my Foundation course and am now thinking of undertaking the Worship Studies Course
So you can see the Unitarian faith has certainly had a strong link in my life and upbringing and all I am doing is putting a little back.

Gerald E Witcher

A Silent Sermon (anon)

A member of a certain church, who previously had been attending services regularly, stopped going. After a few weeks, the preacher decided to visit him.

It was a chilly evening. The pastor found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for his preacher's visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a comfortable chair near the fireplace... and waited.

The preacher made himself at home but said nothing. In grave silence, he contemplated the dance of the flames around the burning logs. After some minutes, the preacher took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone, then he sat back in his chair, still silent.

The host watched all this in quiet contemplation. As the one lone ember's flame flickered and diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and dead.

Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting. The preacher glanced at his watch and realised it was time to leave. He slowly stood up, picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow, once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it.

As the preacher reached the door to leave, his host said with a tear running down his cheek. "Thank you so much for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon. I will be back in church next Sunday."

If only it was that simple.

Contributed by Gerald Witcher

Some thoughts on Pentecost

I have a confession to make. Until now, I hadn't really given Pentecost a second thought. I knew vaguely what it was about – the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples, and their 'speaking in tongues', so that no matter where their audience came from, and what their mother-tongue was, they could be understood. But I'd never really sat down and thought about what messages it might have for me as a Unitarian.

The first thing that struck me when I read the story carefully, was that the old traditional pictures of the disciples sitting quietly, almost primly, in the Upper Room, with the neat flame burning on their heads, and a beatific expression on their faces, bear virtually no relation to the experience described in Acts 2 with its rushing winds and burning flames. Regardless of what we believe may have really been happening, as a psychological experience it must have been pretty terrifying, don't you think?

These were a group of simple people, primarily fishermen, whose leader, a man they believed to be divine, had been violently taken from them, tortured and killed. Then came the finding of the empty tomb at Easter, the claim that Jesus was in fact alive, various reported meetings and sightings of him, including the earth shattering moment when Doubting Thomas was invited to touch the wounds. Then Jesus was taken from them again, this time being 'ascended into heaven' – and then they were left with nothing, but instructions to wait.

And so they had waited, no doubt struggling with fear, and doubt as to their future. Now here they are, feeling as if they are being buffeted by strong winds and seeing visions of burning flames. And yet the result was not fear and weakness but empowerment, not a complete falling apart, but instead a healing, a unifying, and a clear path forward.

How many of us, in our spiritual journeys, have gone through periods of terror, abandonment and confusion? How many times have we waited, praying for peace, praying for strength. In our lives as a community of spiritual seekers, we often come together seeking a common enlightenment, searching together to find a path through dark times – and often it is the crises in our community, the difficulties, disagreements and despair, that can lead to a much deeper understanding of ourselves, a strengthening of our common goals, and a healing of our divisions.

I found another common factor – the power of the flame. Luke, in his writing describes the Holy Spirit descending upon the disciples like a flame. And fire as a religious symbol has a long history, from one of the four core elements of the pagans, through God appearing to Moses as a burning bush, and even us Unitarians with our flaming chalice. There aren't many Unitarian meetings whether of 2, 3 or 300 people, that manage to escape the use of candles. And while we may not believe that the flaming chalices in our services are embodiments of the living spirit of God, they are still a powerful force that when used in the right way can help bring calm, inspiration and a fervent recommitment to our spiritual faith.

And yet it is important for us to remember that the fire of our souls is not a tame thing. Fire in nature can be warming, comforting and homely, as anyone who has ever enjoyed a log fire on a cold winter's night will easily attest to. And the fire of our Spirit can equally be a warming, gentle thing, spreading love to those around us. But fire is also destructive and violent, a force of nature that we cannot always control, and sometimes the zeal in our hearts can deafen us to the quiet voice of reason. It is such rampant, uncontrolled fire that inspires the fanatic, the evangelist, even the religious terrorist. While we need the fire of the Spirit, we must also make sure we stay tuned in to that still small voice of calm.

But perhaps for me the most important message from the story of Pentecost comes in verse 4 – the disciples were no longer afraid, and went out and began to proclaim their faith – and the people understood them. As the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples, the barriers of language and culture were broken down – not so that everyone thought and looked the same, but so that everyone understood each other in their own language and culture. But what is the possible meaning of this for us today? Perhaps a strengthening of our belief that the Spirit of God can draw us all into a new family in which we are able to understand and break down all the cultural barriers that separate us and create conflict., and can enable us to treat each other as equals, with love and mutual care.

That, in and of itself, sounds like a lovely idea. But we've got some serious decision making to do before we can get to that part. The story of Pentecost tells that the disciples, once endowed with the Holy Spirit, went out and spoke to the people, and proclaimed their faith, and their belief in the great things God had done. We too often express our belief in our services that the spirit of God is in us all, that we all have that spark, that flame of God

burning inside us, and that through our belief in the divinity of all people we can understand and break down all the cultural barriers in the world, and spread the love of God to everyone.

But think of the words of Rev Michael Dadson, in his 'Let it Show', in *With Heart and Mind*; "Is that the point and purpose of our spiritual seeking; ever to increase the ability to notice, contrive and perhaps extend, such moments of realisation that we live ever more nearly with our spiritual truth? Or is there an outward corollary to this inner process; an imperative not simply to know and feel something, but to show and share it?"

Telling ourselves that we are part of the divine, and exploring our own spirituality is a worthy thing to do, that is not in dispute. But is there much point to it, if all we do is keep it to ourselves? Sad to say, I can't help feeling that we Unitarians are quite good at that – it's not that we don't want to share our faith, more a fear of being thought to be shoving our faith down other people's throats against their wishes, something that we've all probably suffered from other people – I still remember being sadly informed by a catholic friend of mine that I was clearly going to hell, when he discovered me with a group of Unitarians singing carols in the precinct at Christmas.

But I worry that we've taken that diffidence a bit too far, and that while we are happy to shout about our faith to each other, our GA Anniversary services, Experience Weeks etc being a case in point, we're not very comfortable about the thought of going out onto the streets and proclaiming our faith, as the first disciples did. God forbid, we think, that anyone should even slightly associate us with 'bible-bashers', or tele-evangelists.

And yet shouldn't we be out there sharing this wonderful faith that we have found? A faith that sees and celebrates the divine spark in everyone, that sees and celebrates the essential unity of humanity and nature, but that also sees and celebrates our diversity – diversity of language, of culture, of religious belief. What are we afraid of – that people will think we are drunk, or mad, like they thought the first disciples were, and mock us?

One of our hymns ends with this beautiful phrase: "Come to me now and I, with love, will greet you, open my heart to all you have to teach, I would know truth and self-control and justice, and be your channel in my deeds and speech". This then, I believe, is our challenge that we can draw from the story of Pentecost – yes to seek the inspiration that blows like a rushing wind, and seers our hearts like a burning flame – seek it in all sources of wisdom, in all places and from all people. Yes to see and celebrate that divine fire within each person we meet. But most of all to stand up, go out into the streets and, in our actions as well in our words, proclaim our faith, be a channel for love, truth, peace and justice in this troubled world.

Sounds scary, I know – sounds like a big ask. But as one of my favourite prayers says, *With our living connections, with our glowing stories, with our flame of freedom moving hand to hand, we nurture this precious light and together, we will turn this world from bleak to bright one flame, one fire, one*

My spiritual journey

After a damaging childhood I left a special needs boarding school for a harsh world for which I was too vulnerable and ill-prepared. Having failed to get into University and then, in the recession of the early 1980s, to gain a job and a home of my own, there followed two and a half years of rootless wandering and personal disintegration. I spiralled downwards, becoming a thief, thug, druggie, street drinker and, at my lowest point in life, a resident at a hostel for homeless men where I spent my worst Christmas (I couldn't face seeing my family).

Following the death by drug overdose of someone I knew, and the callous way the dying man was treated by the 'alternative society' in which he was a second class citizen, I saw my own 'future' writ large (death or prison), realised the life force within me and that the 'Peace' Convoy was no alternative to Thatcherite Britain, only a mirror of it. I became intoxicated now with personal ambition; a brilliant career at University followed, in which I gained a first class honours degree, an MA with distinction and a DPhil in English Literature. I even saw a few of my poems published. Before he died my father told me, 'You have turned your life around and lifted yourself up by your bootstraps.'

Success ended there; I failed to get a university lectureship or to publish any more poems; the only work I could get was part-time casual teaching in Further and Adult Education. For the past thirteen years these narcissistic and blasphemous words had rung in my head; "The stone that the builders rejected shall become the head of the corner." Their promise had been a lie. A mid-life crisis followed in which I became bitterly disappointed, angry and in despair, and in which the old feelings of worthlessness and failure revisited me.

Then I realised that in seeking success, recognition and status, I had been craving that which is transient, external and ultimately unsatisfying. I had sought 'treasures on Earth which moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.' I had built my house on sand instead of rock. True happiness can only be found inside oneself and in awareness of being in the Eternal Now. I had been addicted to the approval and esteem of others as an antidote for my lack of approval of and esteem for myself. Now I discovered an unconditional approval and esteem; God's love for me as I am, as She or He created me, aside from my merits and achievements. I had tried to redeem myself through achievement, to earn salvation, a materialistic salvation, whereas what was needed for my redemption was trust in divine power, wisdom and goodness, a spiritual salvation.

Also, I learned that self-realisation lies in self-transcendence; now I find

fulfilment in serving others as a teacher of creative writing for mental health service-users, a volunteer for mental health charities and a lay worship leader at York Unitarian Chapel. My poems are now acts of worship.

This has been my journey but it is not over yet, may be never-ending. And as I am now being transformed by Grace, as long as I surrender to it, I hope Grace will complete this process in eternity in which, as St Paul writes, 'We shall all be changed'.

Brinley Price

For your Information – new Facebook page

Tim Moore has just set up a page on Facebook called UK Unitarian Worship Leaders Network. It is a forum for folk to talk on-line about their experiences of leading worship, both ministers and lay worship leaders.

This Day

This day
I desire to make connections
To sustain a sense of the sacred
To be graceful and gracious
To listen to the silences between the words
To be mindful of the beauty in each moment
To give thanks for the beauties
Of tree and flower,
Birdsong and laughter,
Friendship and fellowship.

Great Mystery at the heart of all that is,
May I be constantly aware of the wonder and joy
Of being awake, alive and aware
And treasure each moment whatever it brings.

And when I fail,
As so often happens,
Let me not be too hard on myself,
But gently reconnect with the heart of the mystery
Sinking gratefully into the soft darkness,
The singing silence.
For each moment we can begin again.
It is never too late.
The time is always now.

Yvonne Aburrow

Whither UALM?

[The article below represents the views of one member of UALM, not of the Editor, nor of the Committee - Ed.]

Q: What's the difference between the Unitarian GA and an insurance company?

A: Culturally, less and less these days.

I see UALM as an organisation in poor health, despite the obvious vitality of its members. It is suffering from the same disease as the GA, which I tentatively name "commercialistic admin-bureaucracy syndrome" or CABS for short.

I attended the 2011 GA in Swansea, and loved the fellowship, the services and the meetings of associations, but I hated the political activities in sessions of the GA. It was like being back in local government, watching a cockpit of main players and their bagmen organising claques and playing procedural tricks to circumvent plain democratic reluctance to accept their wiles. It was infested with CABS.

It was immediately apparent to me as someone who knows a few ropes from my working life that the surrender of central control of Unitarianism to a new Executive was fraught with potential vicissitudes. I kept asking other delegates: "Who are these people?" and the invariable reply was: "No idea - we've never heard of them either." The whole thing had a flavour that I dubbed: "establishment Unitarianism".

I vowed that I would return to my congregation and the neighbouring ones to concentrate on worship, prayer, singing and writing my faith. My attitude to the GA was and is roughly that of the Prophet Micah towards Jerusalem. I just seek to preach the Spirit to anyone who will listen.

I got another shock at the LLSG meeting at Hucklow. I went expecting a sort of retreat where practitioners of leading congregational worship swapped spiritual insights and approaches. Instead I got another unwelcome rehash of my former working life – a management training course.

The central theme was "conflict resolution". It seems the Executive are very concerned to instil this topic, presumably as they anticipate generating conflict and want it resolved on their terms. The teaching ministry of Jesus was all about this: "turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5: 39) sums it up. Unfortunately the paper we got on was apparently copied out of someone's MBA notes with zero scriptural input. A bit like the job description exercise, the weekly hours diary, task prioritisation, project groups, flip charts, the small ministry working strategy (What's wrong with Matthew 18: 20: "where two or three are gathered together"?) and the briefing about the new line management model at the GA. There was a demonstration of the vital skill of how to control a meeting. It was all infected with CABS and tasted of Establishment Unitarianism.

Real Unitarians are characteristically suspicious of establishment thinking.

Give us lined paper and many will write the other way on. I totally reject intrinsically selfish commercial ideals and goals. They should be rendered unto Caesar, not to us. I am retired and finished with all this guff.

From what I hear about this year's GA it was more of the same from both sides- more control, more resentment. This will not do. For me, the last straw is hearing about the Executive's meddling in worship matters. They seem to have two working commissions on worship- one about ministry by ministers, on which the ministers are fairly represented, and another on ministry in general including lay ministry –that's US- on which ministers are also well represented. We seem to be represented by a minister. If we do actually need a commission on ministry, something of which I am less than convinced, then any idiot can see that factional infighting and special pleading have to be set apart and one unified commission established. It should clearly have representatives of all worship practitioners including lay as well as ordained stipendiary ministers and have one delegate from the Executive. Now I hear that the Executive is setting up a "Worship Strategy" project. I reject this without needing to know any details. Unitarianism does not need a Vatican, a Lambeth Palace or a group of shadowy ayatollahs.

In my view only one constitution can provide permanent safeguards against this sort of creeping hegemony that is foreign to our traditions. There has to be an iron curtain between worship on one side, and housekeeping on the other. If the work of the Executive is limited to stewardship of the patrimony, there will still be hard working volunteers willing to serve on it but the appeal to power freaks considerably diminished. The President and past presidents can form a non-executive trust to transfer the *en bloc* funding of ministerial sustentation and other support for worship.

There is an obvious structure for the worship side: a new Fellowship of Unitarian Lay Ministry should be established based on the present Fellowship of the Unitarian Ministry. These two autonomous bodies can be joined by a Covenant of Mutual Fellowship and Support and a standing council formed by the officers of both.

On a reasonable calculation, between a quarter and a third of all Unitarian services are taken by ordained ministers, including retired ones. The remainder are lay led. UALM purports to promote the cause of lay leadership, but it clearly does not need promoting. I revere the enormous learning and commitment of our ministers, but if they all vanished overnight, a greatly impoverished Unitarianism would still be at worship the following Sunday. If the entire lay leadership vanished, the faith would almost cease to exist.

One of the explicit purposes of UALM is "to support the GA": this is wrong. The GA should be there to support us. If it ever comes to the pass when congregations begin to secede and disaffiliate from the GA, and my own congregation took such a vote, then I should decide on the merits of the case and not on some undertaking I assumed by joining UALM.

UALM needs to change in several ways. I suggest the following draft agenda:

- Outreach: a change of name from "Association" to Fellowship" and a

serious initiative to recruit the majority of lay leaders who are independent or only belong to district associations, including some very senior ones who would adorn our ranks and be politically unignorable;

- Democracy: suitable arrangements for choosing officers and delegates by a universal e-ballot;
- Self-assertion: a confident statement of our contributions to Unitarianism and rights to representation on any body considering worship matters. This would include dropping the “Support the GA” clause in favour of a more interactive formula; and
- Agreeing a Covenant of Mutual Fellowship and Support with the Fellowship of the Ministry (several ministers have indicated that this would cause them no qualms whatsoever).

If anyone wishes to correspond with me by email I should be most interested in their views.

Jim Stearn

Future *ministry* for ALL

The Future *ministry* Project, UK was launched in 2007 by our former General Secretary, Jeff Teagle following his John Rely Beard lecture at the GA at the time of his retirement. Jeff Teagle found that the full time professional ministry of the Unitarian Church was in such decline that, if the current trends continued for the next ten years (i.e. until 2018) we would be left with only 32 such ministers of whom 88% would be over fifty years old. I reported at the last GA in the section on Local Leadership that, on a count based on the Directory for 2011, this trend was indeed continuing five years later, with only small variations from year to year. An article based on that estimation will be forthcoming, I believe, in the Inquirer. Additionally, I quote, “A count of the information in the Directory suggests that we have, today, of the 165 churches listed in the UK, around 58 (35%) which have no recognised unretired minister in any shape or form in the widest sense of the word ‘minister’ – not full time professional, not lay pastor, not lay preacher, not approved lay leader or even lay person in charge”. In the same article I surveyed the ways in which the Future *ministry* Scotland project was experimenting with strategies for coping with this problem, and in another following it, I surveyed the options open to the UK church in bringing spiritual leadership to ALL.

I concluded that “Nevertheless, always, the fundamental quality of the spiritual life and fellowship within any single congregation lies with the quality of the relationships within that congregation. A ‘spiritual leader’ may set a good example in the way he or she relates to people but it is the responsibility of every member to foster and maintain those qualities of relationship which make newcomers want to belong to any congregation. But there are many spiritual leaders, if that is the case. We are all models to

each other. In this respect, the long term survival of the Quakers 'who believe in the priesthood of all believers' over more than two hundred and fifty years should be a matter of interest to us, even of study.

If so much of the future of Unitarianism, is going to rest on the effective collaboration of egalitarian bands of local spiritual leaders, worship leaders or other leaders, we should be studying the places where this has been most successful, learning best practice from them and setting up short training courses widely offered and based on what we may have learned."

I almost wrote there 'This is where the UALM may be able to help.' But, instead, I am writing it here. We, the members of the UALM, will, I guess, have valuable experience of what does and does not work in sharing collaborative local (spiritual) leadership and I would like to draw systematically on that experience.

My initial suggestion (you may well persuade me that it can be improved) is that we begin with anecdotal evidence **in confidence**. I cannot organise this on my own. So I would ask for at least two, preferably three, but not more, volunteers to help. (rif.brown@btinternet.com). If you get in touch with me I will propose and discuss a plan of action which we can all agree upon.

I hope that an initiative like this can feed into the development of a short training course for those on the ground who are not full time professional ministers and will probably never work with one, and who are working alone and together on keeping this church alive – and even winning.

Iain Brown



Meditation – Anthem of Joy

We give thanks for sunshafts through clouds
Sending spears of crystalline light
Into the sea beneath

We give thanks for the whisper of wind,
Winding itself between the corn on the cliff
Over the cadence of surf below.

We give thanks for the tang of salt
Stinging our nostrils with each breath
As we seek to sample the
Delicacies of the hedgerows.

We give thanks for the smooth coolness of the seaworn rock,
Weathered and shaped by tide after tide
Thrust and thrown and rolled round
And laid to rest in its nest of soft sand.

A choir of senses singing the song of God

We give thanks for sunshafts through windows
Sending warming beams, health giving warmth
To the skin and heart
To the accompaniment of manufactured rays
On a congress of colour arranged with exactness

We give thanks for the whisper of quiet breath
Of people nearby
Over the gentle traffic tumult
Of business as usual.

We give thanks for the perfume
Of polished wood, shaped, rounded and rubbed smooth
Sleek surfaces meeting at sharp edges
And curved contours.

A modest chorus singing the praise of people

Let us see
Let us listen
Let us inhale
Let us feel

Let us atune ourselves to the
Counterpoint of the natural and the spiritual
With human harmonies
Found in familiar form
And coupled by rhythm and measured time

May we add the voice of our lives
To that great anthem of joy.

Martin Gienke

The article below is a transcript of Rev. Cliff Reed's talk at the Unitarian Renewal Group slot at Keele 2012 GA Meetings. I thought it was so inspirational, that I asked his permission to reprint it in this newsletter. Sue Woolley

Expressing Our Diversity in Worship by Rev. Cliff Reed

Diversity in worship follows naturally from the diversity of belief and devotional life in the worshipping community, and in the sensitivity to it of the worship leader, or leaders. Diversity in worship should flow naturally from the depth of faith and breadth of experience in those arranging it, leading it, and taking part in it. It need not - and should not - be artificially contrived for the sake of it.

In the Unitarian context, worship should reflect, not so much the differences there may be between us, but rather the essential unity of spirit of which our diversity is but several expressions. It is not so much whether we are Christian, Humanist, Earth-centred, or whatever, that matters, but whether we hold our personal beliefs lovingly and with an open mind and heart - willing and prepared to see the connections between all expressions of the humble human spirit.

In worship, whatever the specifics of its content, all those taking part must be - and feel themselves to be - free to be true to their own conscience, without infringing on anyone else's. The worshipper, even though his/her beliefs may differ from the leader of worship, should still feel that his/her faith is respected. By the same token, the leader of worship should feel respected in the faith that has inspired him/her in its preparation and conduct.

Although I am essentially liberal Christian in my Unitarianism, my faith could also be seen as humanist, in the original and non-dogmatic sense of the word. My faith is also informed by my knowledge and experience of the other faith traditions I have studied and whose members I have encountered and worked with in various contexts over the years. And Nature - the Earth and beyond - has always been to me of immense spiritual significance and a constant source of inspiration. It is out of this 'diversity' in my own seamless and coherent Unitarian faith that I have, down the years, created worship and materials for worship.

It is, in my view, neither necessary nor practicable for any single act of worship to reflect or to cater for the full gamut of Unitarian diversity! But the worship life of a congregation is more than just one service. And it should not be judged on the evidence of one service, either, even though every service, whatever its particular focus, should seek to reflect the Unitarian ethos.

Over time, though, the nature of that worship life should be such as to speak to the diverse spiritual needs - which, of course, are far more than the merely 'theological' ones - of that congregation. And achieving this is not the responsibility of worship leaders alone. Those who attend and participate in the congregation's services should not necessarily expect every one of them to be in accord with their own views and beliefs. They should allow for other people's beliefs, needs, and sensitivities to be catered for too, even though these may differ from their own.

Ideally, the worship of a Unitarian community allows for the diversity of faith and expression that will be found both in its membership and within its

members. The role of the worship leader is to be conscious of that diversity while remaining true to his/her own faith and conscience. That 'leader' may be a 'facilitator' of worship, but he/she is a worshipper too - not a mere functionary! The spiritual authenticity of an act of worship depends on that.

Diversity in worship is not an ideological requirement; it is the consequence of sharing a spiritual path that is open to new insights, new promptings of the Divine, as they come to each of us in our infinitely diverse lives. In leading worship, and in worshipping, we can do no more - and no less - than be true to what we have learned along the way. As Jesus said, according to Muslim tradition (and in an admittedly different context), "I could spend only of what I had in my purse." *

*Attar of Nishapur, in Idries Shah's *The Way of the Sufi* (1968; Penguin 1974)

Dates for Your Diary

Unitarian Music Society Summer Conference

When: Friday 31st August – Monday 3rd September 2012

Where: The Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre, Great Hucklow, BUXTON, SK17 8RH

Theme: For those who sing, play or are just music enthusiasts.

More details: Adrienne Wilson 01483 421 905

Unitarian Women's Group Conference

When: Friday 26th – Sunday 28th October 2012

Where: The Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre, Great Hucklow, BUXTON, SK17 8RH

Theme: The power of anger in the work of love

More details: Sue Cooper 01482 881765

Unitarian Association for Lay Ministry Conference

When: Friday 23rd – Sunday 25th November 2012

Where: The Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre, Great Hucklow, BUXTON, SK17 8RH

Theme: Nurturing ourselves.

More details: Sue Woolley 01604 870 746

What's UALM all about?

Do you take services for a Unitarian congregation, or would you like to learn how to take services? Are you involved in or interested in Unitarian lay leadership and lay ministry? If the answer to any of these is yes, or even just a maybe, then please join UALM! There is a newsletter twice a year, a weekend conference in November at Great Hucklow (this is both educational and inspirational, challenging and entertaining), the opportunity to meet with other members, and lots of information about the Worship Studies Course. The best way to explain exactly what we are about is to show you our mission in life – read on!

UALM Objects:

- to support all those involved in delivering worship in Unitarian churches and chapels
- to support all those involved in lay leadership of a Unitarian congregation, whatever form this might take
- to promote and share best practice in Unitarian worship and lay ministry
- to support the General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches

It should be stressed that UALM is open to ministers, lay leaders and Unitarians who are interested to any degree in the delivering and improvement of worship and leadership through lay ministry, whether you are a lifelong Unitarian, or only joined us last week – everyone has something to offer.

UALM Committee

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Secretary: Mrs. Sue Woolley, UALM, 5 Martins Road, Piddington,
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Please

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Please contact David for all membership submissions.
You may download an application form from
ualm.org.uk/join.html, and send it, with a cheque for
£10, made payable to 'UALM', to David as above.

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