



THE YORK UNITARIAN

St. Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York, YO1 8NQ

April 2020

FROM THE EDITOR THEY CAN'T CANCEL SPRING!

Newspapers recently, Thursday 19 March, carried a message from David Hockney, Yorkshire's most distinguished living artist.

They can't cancel spring!

he said and his message was illustrated with an authentic David Hockney picture of daffodils.

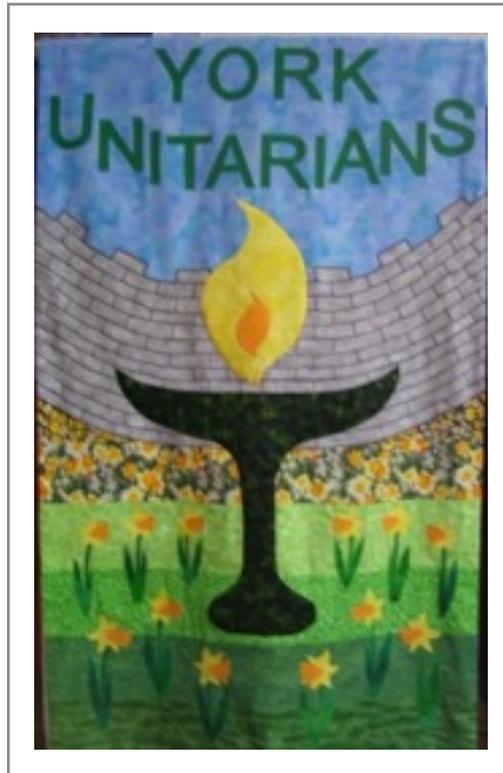
I can't use a copy of Hockney's daffodil picture here. It will be his copyright and require his permission. So instead here is a picture of our Chapel banner - designed by Marta Hardy and created by Margaret Hill. The banner shows bright yellow daffodils, as presently in flower on the banks below the York city walls.

They can't cancel spring!

says David Hockney and neither have present circumstances cancelled the flowering daffodils on our city's walls. For those of us who embrace a spiritual perspective on life the flowering daffodils express a significant message - that however bleak the circumstances we will strive to keep hope alive even if, for us, circumstances should happen to change. For people of faith - whatever 'beyond' there may happen to be:

They can't cancel spring!

Neither should we cancel spring and there are things which we can do to help keep normal life flowering such is this remarkable technological spring in which we now live.



We all have telephones and many of us even have smart phones. In addition, almost all of us have computers and send each other e-mails; and on Sunday last (thanks to Zoom and Laura Cox's initiative) 15 of us - including Sue Catts in Australia! - gathered for an hour's sharing of news and concerns. Hopefully we can continue with this new form of community. How we conduct this will evolve but a mixture of informal sharing and guided reflection seems possible.

Physical isolation is not sufficient to stop us communicating with one

another; and, remember that if you are a Chapel member you only recently received the updated list of Chapel members and their contact details - many thanks to Claire Lee for this.

So, once more, As David Hockney says:

They can't cancel spring!

Andrew M. Hill

A MONTH OF SUNDAYS

Sunday morning 'Zoom gatherings' at 10.30a.m. are evolving. More specific details will be e-mailed to Chapel members and friends as they emerge.

The Chapel's AGM (29 March) (the first as York Unitarians CIO) is postponed.

Meanwhile all other events at the Chapel during March and April have been cancelled (see below and page 6)

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAPEL'S PASTORAL CARE

Claire Lee writes: What strange times we are living through.

If you are younger and healthy, these times will be an inconvenient blip – a time to talk and laugh about with future generations.

If you, like me, happen to be older, have any kind of chest complaint or have a suppressed immune system, then really we are only going to get one shot at this.

I am semi-isolating as I can't afford to catch coronavirus. So, no chapel, no groups, no talks, no meetings for me or Mark until this is over.

It's difficult to make the decision to isolate or semi-isolate. It comes with a whole load of baggage! I am getting older – a hard one. I am actually quite vulnerable health wise – a harder one. This could actually kill me – but let's not go there yet!

So just because activities or groups haven't been cancelled doesn't mean that you have to go along. If people don't understand why you don't want to travel on public transport or go to groups – well, that's their problem.

All I am saying is be kind to yourself and those closest to you. If you do decide to isolate then please keep in touch with members of the Chapel's Pastoral Care team – Dee Boyle, Barbara Barnes, Janet Eldred, Marta Hardy, Simon Hardy and myself. A phone call can make a long day shorter. In isolation know that you are not totally alone and you are not forgotten. *Claire Lee*

ST CRUX FUND RAISING DAY



Our 2020 fundraising day for Chapel funds at St. Crux Hall (Stonebow end of Whip-Ma-Whap-Ma Gate) is planned to be on Friday 21st August

We hope the Coronavirus epidemic will be over by then and the sale will be able to go ahead.

We need crafts, new gifts (perhaps those unwanted ones from Christmas), jams, good quality bric-a-brac and pre-loved books.

Maybe now is the time to go through your cupboards and bookshelves and select what you don't want and put them aside to bring in when the Chapel re-opens?

Or is this just the time to start making something for the sale? -

We have knitters, sewers, woodworkers, candle makers, etc. If you are confined to home during the next few weeks, could you make something?

CANCELLATIONS

Lunchtime Concerts see page 6
Late Music April and May
General Assembly Birmingham 7-9 April
York Pride 6 June

FROM THE CHAPEL COMMITTEE

- The Chapel Committee met on Sunday 1 March. Apologies were received from David Zucker, Elizabeth Faiers and Jenny Jacobs. Barbara Barnes provided opening words.
- Nick Morrice reported regarding the membership status of 4 members who had made no recent financial contributions. 2 of these would remain as members and 2 were unresolved.
- The Chapel's place on the 2012 York Pride March on 6 June was confirmed. The secretary has secured the availability of the YUU LGBT banner which is lighter than the Unitarian HQ one. A co-ordinator is needed.
- Ministry - there was a useful discussion as to whether or not we should pursue either a part time or a full time applicant for our now vacant 'pulpit' and the financial implications of such an appointment.
- At present there is £125,000 in 3 different Chapel accounts (CAF Bank, COIF and Skipton Building Society) sufficient for a 3 year full time appointment. This excludes the Chapel Charity's permanent capital fund which continues inviolate. £8000 has been received from the Inland Revenue following 4 back dated gift aid claims.
- Laura Cox reported that worship leaders and musicians were all arranged up to the end of June.
- York Unitarians Charitable Incorporated Organisation: vesting of the Chapel (building and congregation) and of the Chapel Charity (permanent endowment) in the new CIO was almost complete. The final phase will be to enter these vestings in the Charity Commissions register of mergers. The Chapel's AGM on Sunday 29 March will be the first AGM of the CIO. It was agreed to pay the solicitor's fee of £500.
- The Chapel has been booked as a polling station for the election of the north Yorkshire police, fire and crime commissioner on Thursday 7 May. Joan Sinanan will be available to assist. Payment to the Chapel will be £500.
- The Chapel Library shelves are 'full' and need some 'editing'.
- The next meeting of the Chapel Committee will be on Sunday 19 April.
- There were discussions regarding the Chapel's Fair Trade Stall, about possible grants for Chapel members attending conferences, and about an occasional choir.
- Jenny Jacobs has agreed to be nominated as Chapel secretary when Margaret Hill retires at the forthcoming AGM. Margaret will continue dealing with matters relating to the conversion into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

OUR PRINCIPLES

These are the principles adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association of North America

WE COVENANT TO AFFIRM AND PROMOTE:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, justice and liberty for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are part.

THE LIVING TRADITION WE SHARE DRAWS FROM MANY SOURCES;

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life.
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenges us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us on our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbours as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit
- Earth centred traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life.

GRATEFUL FOR THE RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

IF JESUS SMILED LIKE THE DALAI LAMA

The sermon by Andrew Hill for York Unitarians on Sunday 9th February 2020

The origins of this sermon lie in a dreadful mistake. At one time I belonged to a small ministers' group: a mixture of clergy from different traditions. The Dalai Lama had recently been visiting and it had been my privilege to meet His Holiness face to face and shake hands with him. Well, in casual conversation with Patrick the group secretary, I unwittingly let out an off-the cuff-remark which began:

If Jesus smiled like the Dalai Lama . . .

I suppose that running through my Unitarian mind must have been something like this:

- that the Tibetan Dalai Lama has traditionally held the status of a god-king; and
- that if the very human Jesus smiled like the present very human Dalai Lama;
- then maybe - only maybe - I could begin to think of Jesus as having the status of a god.

Well, some weeks later Patrick rang me:

Andrew, (he said), I keep thinking about your remark "If Jesus smiled like the Dalai Lama . . ." Would you like to talk about it at our group?

Well, Patrick was so nice and so persuasive that I simply melted.

TIBETAN BUDDHISM

My first introduction to Tibetan Buddhism was a book circulating in the school dormitory in the late 1950s written by someone called T. Lobsang Rampa and entitled *The Third Eye*. The 'third eye' was a reference to Gautama's enhanced psychic powers. In another book he told the story how, following the death of the 13th Dalai Lama monks scoured Tibet for the child in whom the deceased Dalai Lama's real self had been reborn and who would be nurtured as the present and 14th Dalai Lama.

As it happened, many years later I read a newspaper article which told me that T. Lobsang Rampa was a fraud and an Irish plumber living in Nelson in Lancashire. But for years, he had many people fooled.

I need to say two or three things about Buddhism and about Tibetan Buddhism in particular:

- First, for Buddhists the ultimate focus of faith is not ultimate being – the jealous God of the three Abrahamic faiths who has defeated all lesser gods, but ultimate liberation and enlightenment - what Buddhists call *nirvana*.

- Secondly,

significant for Tibetan Buddhists are Bodhisattvas – persons pausing on the verge of enlightenment to share their teachings of wisdom and compassion; and

- Thirdly, since enlightenment is a path achieved by few but open to all, there may be several bodhisattvas, and sometimes the bodhisattva title is given to others whose efforts are clearly directed towards securing the welfare of the many. Thus for some the Dalai Lama is a Bodhisattva and maybe Jesus was too.



CHRISTIAN FAITH

Now, in Christian faith the central affirmation is a relationship between God and human life focused through Jesus Christ. Exactly how this relationship is expressed and functions has been both the glory and the tragedy of Christian heritage but for the moment some such statement as

“Jesus is the human face of God”

will do.

But how well will it do? During the 1930s scepticism about the human character of Jesus became so acute in Christian theological circles that a distinguished German biblical scholar called Rudolf Bultmann wrote:

I do indeed think that we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus . . . [*Jesus and the Word* 1934 Fontana edition p.14]

Scholarship is nowadays somewhat less sceptical but with the best will in the world we still only have reported sayings and reported in a language different from the language Jesus actually spoke; and when it comes to “the human face of God”, as distinct from “the human words of God” well we are in even greater difficulties because no one knows at all what Jesus actually looked like.

For a start Jewish Christians tabooed “the human face of God” and represented Jesus either as a lamb, or as a fish, or as a cross; and later Christians developed two completely different descriptions of what Jesus looked like:

- one described Jesus as a young beardless good-shepherd looking man, with curly hair not dissimilar to representations of the Greek gods Hermes and Orpheus.
- the other described him as a man with an austere face, staring eyes, full beard and long hair, seated and teaching from a scroll.

However, the earliest known recovered portrait of Jesus is a mid-4th century wall painting in the Roman catacombs. I’m not going to say that they are all ‘fiction’ but they all leave a great deal either to human imagination or to divine inspiration.

THE DALAI LAMA

This brings me back to the Dalai Lama. Given that we have no authentic portrayal of what Jesus as “the human face of God” looked like, and what sort of smile Jesus might have had – but he had a sense of humour –

How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle . . .

and also a sense of the ridiculous:

How many times must I forgive my brother. Not seven times but seventy times seven! . . .

And since he had a sense of humour then surely “this human face of God” must sometimes have broken out in laughter and sometimes smiled. I cannot imagine that he didn’t. But since we have no authentic portrayal of Jesus as “a human face of God” then, why not borrow the extraordinarily infectious smile of this maybe bodhisattva from Tibet, this alleged god-king (called the Dalai Llama) who refrains from taking himself too seriously and at whose feet thousands of today’s young people willingly sit because he takes seriously their faith that the world can and should be a better place.

SMILING

You will have come across those claims that there are sixty muscles in the face – that it takes forty of them to frown and only twenty of them to smile. I don’t know how true that is but smiling is one of those human things we do naturally, without thought and thinking and smiling does affect how we relate to other people.

Long, long time ago - back at school in the late nineteen fifties - we had an odd job man. Rather cruelly we called him “death warmed up”. We asked him questions. We told him jokes but nothing would make him smile. Then one day someone picked some blue bells – my old school must be the only school in Britain with a blue bell wood – and we gave them to him, and he smiled!

In our daily lives [wrote the Dalai Lama] we love smiles. I especially love a genuine smile, not a sarcastic smile, or a diplomatic smile, which sometimes even increases suspicion. But I consider the genuine smile something really precious.

It is the great bridge of communication. Whether you know the same language or not, whether you are from the same culture, or nation, or race - all that is secondary. The basic thing is to realise that the other is a human being, a gentle human being who wants happiness and does not want suffering, just like ourselves. At that basic level, we just smile - we can exchange smiles. Then immediately the barrier is broken and we feel close. [quoted in Steven C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder eds. *Spirit and Nature* (Boston, 1992) pp. 119-20

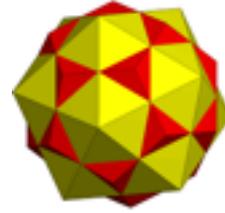
I couldn't tell you what the Dalai Lama said half the time. His speech was difficult but his smiles - they were infectious. Now if Jesus smiled like the Dalai Lama . . . Amen

SOME WORDS OF THE DALAI LAMA

In our daily lives, we love smiles. I especially love a genuine smile, not a sarcastic smile, or a diplomatic smile, which sometimes even increases suspicion. But I consider the genuine smile something really precious. It is the great bridge of communication. Whether you know the same language or not, whether you are from the same culture, or nation, or race - all that is secondary. The basic thing is to realise that the other is a human being, a gentle human being who wants happiness and does not want suffering, just like ourselves. At that basic level, we just smile - we can exchange smiles. Then immediately the barrier is broken and we feel close.

SHAPES

a poem written for the Chapel poetry group
by York Unitarian Joan Sinanan



A simple, gentle, caressing word
No sign of implication
No clue of complication.

Born in a sphere, and from
a pear-shaped sphere
We are shaped and see . . .

The triangle, eternal, regular
and very irregular
A square which needs circled
A box to tick . . .
Pandora's.

And the rectangle . . .
A shelf to shelve things off on.
A suitcase, all the world's books,
Written music, painted canvas,
A ticket.

Then there's skull-shaped . . .
A walnut, an orchid, a cloud
Of course . . . a brain . . . shapes
and gapes of knowledge
Of thoughts, feelings
Shaping life.

Dodecahedron!
Dodecahedron!
Dodecahedron!

Ah . . . That's better!

LUNCHTIME CONCERTS

Adrienne Wilson writes: David Hammond and I regret very much that we have had to postpone our lunchtime concerts until the Chapel in St Saviourgate is allowed to reopen. Artists are being offered the opportunity to book for our 2021 series. Meanwhile, David has very enterprisingly recorded some public domain piano pieces which you might like to sample. Here is a dropbox link, which he may add to in the future.

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3xpbya1tmxqimis/AABpDm96a_4a4Ha8D8CSuR3na?dl=0

FROM THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF UNITARIAN & FREE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

Dear Secretaries and Ministers

As you may have heard, most Unitarian and Free Christian congregations have ceased their usual services and gatherings due to the coronavirus pandemic.

We recommend cancelling all in-person gatherings to protect the safety of staff, community-members, and the wider public. This is advised on the basis of the duty of care in providing a safe space for the community. Given that some users will be from those groups who are most at risk from the virus, gathering together physically does present a serious risk to lives and we must all stay safe and ensure others do likewise.

The GA is bringing together information to help congregations meet the needs of their communities during this pandemic, when the needs are greater than ever, but the ability to meet in person is highly limited.

Please stay abreast of health guidance, and take good care of yourselves during this situation, which we expect to last for several months. Our aim is to remain in close communication with congregations as the situation is changing rapidly. In the meantime, we invite you to:

- Keep an eye on the latest health advice: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- Check whether there is a Covid-19 Mutual Aid Group for your area, where you could offer or request help: <https://www.facebook.com/CovidAidUK/>
- Take care of your mental health: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799>
- Reflect on the poem [on page 8] from Unitarian Universalist minister Lynn Ungar

With best wishes from the GA team

ADDITIONAL ADVICE

This advice should be used in conjunction with information and advice given by Government and health professionals, the pace of both change and advice means that you should refer to these sources regularly.

Gatherings and Meetings at Chapels. Given the current situation Essex Hall is making a clear call to suspend services, meetings and events that are held in Chapel and associated buildings. This is advised on the basis of the

duty of care in providing a safe space for the community. Given that some users will be from those groups who are most at risk from the virus, gathering together physically does present a serious risk to lives and we must all stay safe and ensure others do likewise.

Practical steps

Please do inform your insurer that the Chapel is closed, like many household policies you may have a clause about the chapel not being used for any significant time.

Good communication is key and consider succession planning for your committee, if key members of your organisation are unable to undertake their roles due to self-isolation and illness.

Any key committee meetings should be assessed as to whether they can be postponed, or undertake via other means such as Skype, WhatsApp etc. If it is essential you meet, then please allow for those who feel unable to attend and provide a layout for the meeting that minimises close proximity. Clearly practice the highest standards of hygiene at these times.

Whilst we will cease to meet in a building, there are many other opportunities to express and demonstrate the Unitarian life. We are working upon some guidance for use of online platforms and how they might be used to facilitate contact and communication and looking at some old style tele-conferencing options for those unable to access IT.

For those Chapels and congregations interested in Livestreaming services the Rev. Daniel Costley has produced a very useful guide to copyright issues <https://www.kentunitarians.org/copyright-issues>. Data Developments have produced a useful walk through for Livestreaming using YouTube <https://www.dropbox.com/.../Youtube%20Livestreaming...>

On a wider pastoral outlook the UUA has a useful guide and although it may require some translation to a UK context the principles it outlines are helpful. This can be accessed at <https://www.uua.org/print/book/243873>

PANDEMIC

a poem by [UUA minister] Lynn Ungar

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Centre down.
And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.
Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

I VALUE

I value the fellowship at this Church
and seek to enrich it
I value my giving to this Church
and seek to give
I value my receiving from this Church
and seek to receive
I value my yearnings within this Church
and seek to be satisfied
I value my faith embodied here
and seek to develop it
I value my work for this Church
and seek to enhance it
I value my worship with this Church
and seek to heighten it
I value my membership of this Church
and seek to declare it
[from the Stockton-on-Tees Unitarian Church
Magazine April 2016]

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS



York Unitarians,
St. Saviourgate Chapel,
St. Saviourgate, York YO1 8NQ
www.york.unitarians.org.uk

Chairperson: David Zucker
<davidgzucker@gmail.com>

Secretary: Margaret Hill
© 01904 693427
<mhill.york@gmail.com>

Treasurer: Nick Morrice
© 01904 765424
<nickmorrice@gmail.com>

Chapel Committee Members:,
Barbara Barnes, Dee Boyle, Laura Cox,
Elizabeth Faiers, Simon Hardy, Andrew
Hill, Jenny Jacobs, Joan Sinanan, and the
Officers

St. Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel Charity
(registered charity: 230167) Trustees:
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York Unitarian editor:
Andrew Hill
© 01904 693427
<amckhill@gmail.com>