



THE YORK UNITARIAN

St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York, YO1 8NQ

April 2022

From the Minister

People often ask me whether Christmas and Easter are busy times in the Unitarian world. Unitarians vary widely in how far they engage with the traditional Church calendar. For me, Christmas is a busy time, but I could easily blink and miss Easter. In fact, one year I was booked as a lay worship leader at a Sheffield chapel and had written the entire service before I noticed that it would be Easter Sunday.

Since then I've become more aware of the liturgical year, but I still tend only to mark Easter day and Palm Sunday. I don't think I've ever led worship for Ash Wednesday, and only once for Good Friday, when the Sheffield District asked all the ministers and ministry students in the area to take part in an online service. If you'd like to see us marking more of these dates at York Unitarians, let me know, but now that we are lucky enough to have access to national online events, if the Christian calendar speaks to you, it's also well worth considering the Unitarian Christian Association's services over Holy Week. For details, check their website <https://www.unitarianchristian.org.uk/> or <https://www.facebook.com/UnitarianChristianAssociation> nearer the time.

Since I became a Unitarian, my major event of April has been, not Easter, but the Unitarian General Assembly's Annual Meetings. This year's meetings are back in person in Birmingham for the first time since the pandemic began, and promise not only some wonderful worship and much necessary business, but also a number of intriguing workshops including one run by the Unitarian Renewal Group and led by Rev Jo James from Leeds and our own Jenny Jacobs with the theme of 'Welcome as a Spiritual Practice.'

This April we can hardly avoid considering the theme of welcome, as we compare our government's responses to the war in Ukraine with that of other world leaders. The charity 'Home for Good' points out: 'In times of war, it is too often children who suffer the most, experiencing the trauma of loss, fear and confusion as to why their safe and familiar surroundings have been taken away from them.' In this context, I'm delighted that we will be supporting the [Separated Child Foundation](#) as one of our charities for 2022-23. Easter, like Christmas, is best celebrated by living its message of hope and new beginnings. What better way to do this than providing support for young people making a new start?



A MONTH OF SUNDAYS at 11am

Sunday 3 April

Reverend Stephanie Bisby
Sunrise and Spring Flowers
Music by David Hammond

*Service followed by a bring & share
lunch in Chapel*

Sunday 10 April

Dee Boyle
What's in a Welcome?
Music by Laura Jones

*Service followed by an outing to a
Nepalese restaurant*

Sunday 17 April

Reverend Stephanie Bisby
Easter
Music by David Hammond

Sunday 24 April

Maud Robinson
(Minister, Underbank Unitarians, Sheffield)
As Swimmers Dare - Reflections on Trust
Music by David Hammond

Myrna wishes to thank members of our Chapel community for their kind thoughts and messages after Hadrian passed away.

‘Though he was technically my ex-husband, we had become extremely close as the years went by. On visits to York, occasionally he had attended Chapel or a concert with me.

Hadrian was interred on 18 January not far from the village we lived in for many years, near Cambridge.’

(With apologies for the omission of this message from the March newsletter - Stephanie.)

Two Shared Meals

On Sunday 3 April there will be a ‘bring and share’ lunch after the service so we can say thank you to Andrew Hill for all his time on the committee and for being so supportive in leading services over the years.

Sunday 10 April at 1pm will be the first of our latest venture of going out for meals together three or four times a year. Dee is organising the first one by booking tables at The Everest Nepalese restaurant in Fossgate to mark the end of our fund raising for the Nepal charity. This meal was due to take place two months ago but we wanted to wait until more people had returned to Chapel again. Please let Dee know asap. if you would like to join the group for lunch.

The restaurant closes at 3pm on Sundays.

David Zucker will be organising the next meal out with details in a future newsletter.

About Maud Robinson

I have worked as a minister since 2007, my first year with a large Unitarian Universalist church near Boston, USA, then for eight years with Unitarians in Edinburgh, followed by a short ministry with Cardiff Unitarians before being called to minister with Underbank Unitarians in Sheffield.

My primary focus in ministry is in walking with others on a spiritual path, where very often ‘being’ is more important than ‘doing.’ I am clear in my own attachment to the word God to describe that which upholds and inspires us, but am mindful that this is a word with which some people struggle and in public discourse I use broad and open language.

I am leading the service in York on 24 April, and have given as my title ‘Where Swimmers Dare... Reflections on Trust’ but I reserve the right to change my mind!



DIARY DATES

Thursdays at 11am: Congregational Meditation in Chapel and on Zoom. Details from Dee Boyle.

Friday 1 April, 7pm: online motions workshop prior to Annual Meetings <https://www.unitarian.org.uk/event/motions-workshop-2022/>.

Saturday 2 April, 1pm: Late Music Concert: Stuart O'Hara (bass) and Ionna Koulllepou (piano), Poetry Settings. Tickets £5 online (www.latemusic.org) or on the door.

Saturday 2 April, 7.30pm Late Music Concert: Bingham String Quartet. Tickets £12/£10 online (www.latemusic.org) or on the door.

Tuesday 5 April, 7.30pm: York Interfaith Meeting at the Mansion House. (Places must be booked in advance.)

Friday 8 April, 12.30pm: Lunchtime Concert, Bethany-Hannah Winteringham, soprano and Malcolm Maddocks, piano.

Saturday 9 April, 3pm: Spring Concert, York U3A Choir and Hanslope Heart and Soul Community Choir.

Tuesday 19 - Thursday 21 April: Unitarian Annual Meetings, Birmingham.

Friday 22 April, 12.30pm: Lunchtime Concert, Hamish Brown (tenor), Alasdair Jamieson (piano), Schumann song cycle.

Wednesday 27 April: York poetry group. Details from Dee Boyle.

Thursday 28 April, 1-3pm: Poetry to Prayer. Details from Stephanie Bisby.

Looking further ahead:

Induction Service for Stephanie Bisby: *Saturday 28 May*

Stall at York Pride: *Saturday 18 June*

York Unitarians 350th Anniversary Celebrations: *Saturday 2 & Sunday 3 July*

St Crux fair: *Friday 8 July*

Yorkshire Unitarian Union Summer Gathering: *Saturday 9 July* at Scarborough.

Come and Write a Prayer

You are invited to come to chapel on Thursday 28 April from 1pm to write your own prayer, inspired by a new or favourite poem (if you have a favourite poem or poetry book feel free to bring it along). It doesn't matter whether you already love writing, or just fancy giving it a go, and you don't have to be a poet or know a lot about poetry. You also don't have to be a theist - prayers can be addressed to God, or the Universe, or simply 'to whom it may concern'! You don't have to share your work, but you can - and you may want to offer it for inclusion in a future newsletter or service. Mostly, it's a chance to spend some time together and invite inspiration.

News from the District

Representatives from across the Yorkshire Unitarian Union (YUU) met in Hull for the quarterly gathering and enjoyed an excellent presentation from Richard Lane of York Community Energy, which challenged us to consider the pros and cons of different approaches to developing sustainable use of energy.

We left better informed but also challenged to think how we might apply this knowledge to our homes, churches and chapels. The meeting also considered the motions for the upcoming Annual Meetings, though briefly as they had only just been received.

During the updates from churches, we learned of the work being done by former Minister at York, Margaret Kirk, and York member Claire Lee, on repairing and reopening the Flowergate Chapel at Whitby, and we hope that it will be possible to visit over the summer or next year.

We also learned that Hull Unitarians share our 350th anniversary (like us, of the congregation but not the building). York will be celebrating our anniversary on 2 and 3 July. On 9 July the YUU will meet for its summer gathering at Scarborough. On 10 July Hull Unitarians celebrate their anniversary.



The Minister's 6 March Address: 'Life On Mars'

I don't know if other worship leaders do this, but every time I sit down to type up my service titles for an upcoming newsletter or write Sunday's sermon, I run a sort of mental check of who I might be about to annoy or offend, either by what I'm saying or, just as often, by what I'm not saying. What's going on in the world that might cause what I'm saying to land in a different way than how I originally intended it? And, of course, when I sent in my sermon titles for March, it wasn't obvious that the thing on everybody's minds was going to be events in Ukraine, which meant that when I got to this week, I had to ask the question, is there really any point in the advertised service?

Who's going to listen to a word about the red planet when our own planet seems to be on the verge of vaporising itself? Of course, in Roman mythology, Mars was the God of war, so there's a certain odd resonance to my title. But talking about robot explorers, periwinkles and perch, centipedes and cities* and science fiction stories, when the world is burning... 'Come on,' said the annoying critic in the imaginary front pew inside my head, 'This is not the time for fantasy! Get real!'

And yet... what could I possibly say in our corner of York that would make the slightest difference to even one person dodging bombs, fleeing their home with only the clothes on their back, wondering who will take them in? Of course I can advise people to write to their MPs and encourage them to put pressure on the government to improve provision for Ukrainian refugees; I can urge people to donate to the Red Cross and Unicef and Save the Children – but my congregation read the papers and watch the news and they can all Google as well as I can, so they've probably already figured out how to do those things. And, like me, they're probably now grappling with the truth that what most of us can do, most of the time, is limited.

You may disagree, but I think, most of the time, what we need from our churches is not another invitation to self-flagellation, but an encouragement to do that which we can do for those in need half a world away, and then to continue serving the world the best way we can, by living as well and wisely as we can in our own little corner of the world. Which means that, whatever is going on in the world, it's still our responsibility to keep sharing the best sources of wisdom we can find: the words and images and music which inspire us to live with faith, hope and love.

At a chapel I used to attend, we had a leaflet which quoted various chapel members talking about what attracted them to our worship, and there's one quotation which has always stuck in my mind. I no longer recall the exact words, but I often find myself thinking of the gist of their message: 'I love coming to a Unitarian Chapel because you'll hear the minister quoting from Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy alongside the Bible.' I've talked before about the importance of humour, and you'd certainly find plenty of that in Douglas Adams' deliciously bizarre sci-fi saga, but what's more relevant now is what else you find there: an unusual perspective on the details of our everyday lives, one which can make us see our world entirely differently.

As Ursula Le Guin argued in the introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, fiction writers are able to present the truth in unique ways, because, in the words of the poet Emily Dickinson, they 'tell the truth but tell it slant.' Want to talk about issues of censorship without being silenced? Set your book among animals or in a future where the clocks strike 13 and your TV watches you, and you have *Animal Farm* or *1984*. Throw in 'firemen' whose job is the burning of literature and you have *Fahrenheit 451*, a stinging critique of the McCarthy era. Concerned about the sexism inherent in society and religion? Tell the story of a young woman forced to live as a concubine in a society where women are only valued



for childbearing, and you might find that even people who've never read your book will recognise the distinctive red cloaks and white hoods of the handmaidens in the TV series.

The Handmaid's Tale was very definitely written to make a political point. But the truth is, even science fiction stories which *don't* address the state of the world *do* address the state of the world. [A brilliant 2015 article in Tor magazine](#) explores the debate over 'whether science fiction and fantasy 'should' or 'shouldn't' address political issues or explore political themes.' 'Underlying the debate,' the article argues, 'are two distinct, albeit complementary, understandings of what a political message 'is' and where it comes from. For some, it is defined by the existence of an explicit, purposive attempt to convey said message... For others, though, pretty much anything is 'message fiction,' because the assumptions/choices operative in worldbuilding, characterisation and narrative are implicit messages in and of themselves. Really these are two forms of political messaging—distinct from one another and not at all equivalent, but nonetheless related. All books contain implicit political messages; only a select few contain the explicit ones.'

We might add that every service contains implicit political messages; only a select few contain the explicit ones.

There's one book I turned to regularly through lockdown, for an infusion of hope, a shot of determination, and a good cathartic cry. Unusually for me, I love the film adaptation just as much as the book. When I re-watch films that made me cry the first time, they often don't have the same effect the second time. But *The Martian* gets me every single time. When the hero Mark Watney, stranded on Mars after an abortive mission, figures out the solution to a tricky problem and it begins to seem as if starvation may no longer be inevitable, I well up. Alone on the planet, he struggles with dust storms, malfunctioning equipment, boredom and loneliness, in a way that many more of us can relate to now than could before Covid. And all the

time, the clock is ticking as his supplies are running lower, and the chances of him lasting long enough for rescue grow slimmer. Then one of the NASA engineers back on earth has a genius breakthrough that brings a lump to my throat, and as if that wasn't enough, I always end up a sobbing wreck when, after the powers-that-be veto the proposed solution as too dangerous, someone else puts his job on the line to try to make it happen anyway.

The worse the world gets, the more I seem to need to hear Mark Watney's musings on why – partial spoiler alert – the powers-that-be give in and approve the mission to try to save his life.

'Why bother?' Mark asks, but then of course he answers himself, because it's not as if there's anyone else on Mars to answer him. His answer begins with 'progress, science, and the interplanetary future we've dreamed of for centuries' but acknowledges that this isn't the whole picture. It's also 'because every human being has a basic instinct to help each other out.' He cites examples of how, 'If a hiker gets lost in the mountains, people will coordinate a search. If a train crashes, people will line up to give blood. If an earthquake levels a city, people all over the world will send emergency supplies.' Anticipating potential objections, he goes on to argue, 'Yes, there are assholes who just don't care, but they're massively outnumbered by the people who do.' Sorry for the language, but I think Mark has a point, and maybe he's right not to sugar coat it. I imagine most of us have been tempted by some choice language lately when it comes to those who don't care; those who treat ordinary people as pawns in their childish power games; those whose thoughtless actions threaten others' lives and livelihoods. And because those few uncaring people in positions of power are always in the news, we need, more than ever, these stories of hope and resilience. We need stories that remind us that individuals can flourish, even in the sparsest and most challenging environments; that progress is possible; and that more



often than not people do look out for each other. Stepping outside of the confines of our ordinary world is what allows us to tell the truth about life, because as Ursula Le Guin says, 'the truth is a matter of the imagination.' The truth is that nobody ever said life was going to be easy, and if we ask for life to be easy we're missing the point, because very often it's the hard stuff that teaches us who we can truly be. In the words of Sydney Knight's wonderful hymn: 'We do not seek a shallow faith.' Instead, we seek a rich, challenging and evolving life. Whatever the circumstances of our real lives, science fiction can help point the way.

* *From Part as Parcel* by Mark L. Belletini, <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/poetry/part-parcel>

Findhorn Unitarian Network

York members Sue Catts, Susan Leadley, Barbara Barnes, Nick Morrice and Adrienne Wilson have all enjoyed Experience Week at Findhorn, the ecovillage and spiritual community in the north of Scotland.

Recently Louise Reeve (Newcastle) and Chris Newsam (Malton) have featured the Findhorn experience in their services at York.

Findhorn (<https://www.findhorn.org/>) is at last starting up in-person workshops and Experience Week is a good place to start - now shortened to 5 days with the option to stay on at the weekend.

The Findhorn Unitarian Network has identified a specific week (June 13-17) to encourage Unitarians to attend together.

Contact

Findhornunitariannetwork@gmail.com
for more details.

Sing Along with 'Greta's Song'

Anneliese Emmans Dean has written a climate change protest song called 'Greta's Song', which she'd like choirs and ensembles across the world to learn and sing. So, if you sing in a choir or group, check out 'Greta's Song' and see if you'd like to be part of the musical climate change revolution! You can download 4-part and 2-part scores to 'Greta's Song' from Anneliese's website, theBigBuzz.biz, where you can also listen to mp3s of each version and watch a clip of a performance. Please spread the word!

Unitarian Baptists

Andrew Hill has an article in [Baptist Quarterly](http://BaptistQuarterly), about York's Unitarian Baptist congregation. Frequently overlooked by both Baptist and Unitarian historians, the group, which was adopted by the 'Unitarian missionary' Richard Wright, was eventually absorbed into the Unitarian congregation of St Saviourgate Chapel.

York Interfaith Group

5 April meeting: 'Faith and Public Life in time of Covid', speaker the Lord Mayor, the Rev. Chris Cullwick. This meeting will be 'live', in the Mansion House, 7pm for 7.30. The Lord Mayor, the Rev. Chris Cullwick, kindly supported our November Interfaith service and it would be lovely if some of us could return the gesture. If you would like to attend, please let Sr. Patricia Harriss know, via the YIG email yorkinterfaithgroup@gmail.com or at the Bar Convent, as soon as possible, so that she can inform the Council of numbers expected.

Congratulations to Past Member Appointed as Oxford Tutor

Former York member Rev. Claire MacDonald has been appointed to the position of Tutor in Ministerial Studies at Harris Manchester College Oxford (one of two colleges which train students in the UK for Unitarian ministry, the other being Unitarian College).
Read more [here](#).



Report from the Committee Meeting of Sunday 6 March 2022

- Now that the national rules have been relaxed, the committee has agreed that wearing masks is optional, but requests that people remain considerate of those who are vulnerable and continue to isolate if they have, or think they may have, Covid.
- The AGM will be held at 12.30 on 27 March and will be followed by a discussion of the motions prior to the Annual Meetings. Jenny Jacobs will circulate the General Assembly motions in advance and invite feedback from those who cannot attend in person.
- Plans are under way for our 350th Anniversary celebrations. Nick Morrice and Myrna Michell are coordinating music for Saturday afternoon and the Sunday service, and Anneliese Emmans Dean has agreed to compere a poetry open mike on Saturday night. Events will be advertised in advance in the York Press, and the committee has agreed to fund a half-page advert, as well as a subscription to the tourist board's service, Visit York. (Our page is now live at <https://www.visitork.org/business-directory/york-unitarians> and our first event has been listed at [https://www.visitork.org/events/a-concert-for-ukraine.](https://www.visitork.org/events/a-concert-for-ukraine))
- Our charities for 2022 will be St Nicks (local) and the Separated Child Foundation. £241.10 was sent to the trustees of the York Rescue Boat from donations at the Big Sing, cash from the collection box in chapel, and £50 donated by Dee in lieu of a preaching fee. (Update: the lunch in aid of Chance for Nepal has also raised £154 for Chance for Nepal.)
- Dylan Nykamp's application to join York Unitarians was unanimously accepted.
- The link to our draft website has been circulated for feedback. The site remains a work in progress but should be finalised within the next month or two.
- The committee thanked Andrew Hill in absentia for his long service on the committee and as pulpit secretary and newsletter editor. A lunch will be arranged to mark his retirement, in addition to the social lunch which is still to be organised.
- Stephanie Bisby's induction service will be at 2pm on Saturday 28 May and Rev Ant Howe will be invited to lead the service. (Update: he has accepted.)
- Margaret Issitt has kindly donated four books to the library.
- Michael Wildblood (architect) is to look at possibilities for a level access meeting space.
- David Hammond offered to play for a Ukraine benefit concert on 25 March. This was approved. Funds will be donated to the Red Cross appeal but future fundraising may also be directed via Unitarians in Poland if Arek Malecki is able to assist us in making contact.
- The new member form is to be amended to include optional date of birth so that we can mark significant birthdays if the member so wishes.
- Painting of the Pride bench is now under way.
- Rich McGeary has set up a Vodafone trial. (Update: this has been successful and Richard Brown and Rich McGeary have arranged transfer of our broadband service to Vodafone.)
- Next meeting: Sunday 15 May. Opening words from Jenny Jacobs. Opening words at the AGM to be provided by Stephanie Bisby.

Sugar Hill Farm

by Brinley Price

26 February 2022

The tribulation threatens,
 A cull of our terrible wretched species
 And only a remnant may live,
 Ride out its world-wide tsunami
 And gaze to the dawn when the shocks have subsided,
 A rising sun over lands of ruins.

But here at least there is peace,
 The sunlight's joy, the cooling waves of birdsong;
 The future is yet non-existent
 Though sometimes worry and sudden discomfort
 Intrude on this present, this premature Spring
 That gives relief from the global state of disease.

I sit outdoors in solitude
 But safe in this enclave of life, this haven of being,
 Pain and death looking mostly distant.
 I listen, watch and feel:
 A breeze caresses my face like a mother, a lover,
 And Nature appears to embrace me, seems like a goddess.

All you who worship psychopaths,
 Who believe the lies of lunatic oracles,
 You are the ones who give birth to the men of lawlessness,
 Your own madness leads your leaders.
 And yet, though water is weak, it carves out valleys;
 Though goodness never prevails it ever remains;
 This evil too must pass.



York Unitarians invite you to a Spring Concert



A programme of International Folk Songs,
Spirituals and Songs from the Shows

from the combined choirs of York U3A & Hanslope
Heart & Soul Community Choir

including a chance to sing along with some
well-known favourites

**Saturday 9th April
at 3pm**

at York Unitarian Chapel, St Saviourgate YO1 8NQ

- Free entry
- Refreshments included
- Donations in aid of Homestart, St Nicks and the Separated Child Foundation – please give generously!

Congratulations to David Hammond and Catherine Strachan for their highly successful fundraiser concert for Ukraine on Friday 25 March in Chapel. The concert featured music by Ukrainian composer Nikolai Kapustin, and raised over £1000 for the British Red Cross DEC Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal. Thanks to all involved and all who attended and donated so generously.

Moving Minds

York Unitarians have worked to become a Dementia-friendly place of worship. We could do more and plan to do more.

We have recently heard from Ellen, a student intern for Moving Minds, a free weekly creative movement session for adults affected by dementia at York St John University.

Ellen tells us that no prior dance experience is necessary to take part in the sessions. They are accessible for all including those who need to remain seated! Dance has been proven to have significant benefits for people with dementia, including stress reduction, improvement in mood as well as boosting social interaction and combating isolation.

Sessions are delivered by professional and experienced facilitators along with student volunteers. The sessions are held 1.30-2.30pm on a Wednesday with time for refreshments afterwards in the dance studio at York St John University.

There are some spaces left for sessions on Wednesday afternoons, so please do get in contact with Elaine Harvey on 07881 922323 if you'd like to join one. The sessions are completely free.

Ellen has also offered to arrange a taster session at the Chapel if there are sufficient people interested in understanding what Moving Minds has to offer. Please get in touch with Janet Eldred or Stephanie Bisby if you would like to be involved in a session at the Chapel.

If you would like to make a one-off donation to York Unitarians CIO by BACS, the details are:

York Unitarians CIO
Sort Code: 40-52-40
Account number: 00032702

A Monthly Standing Order is particularly welcome. Please also consider Gift Aid if you are a taxpayer. More information from the Treasurer
Richard Brown

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

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Laura Cox, Elizabeth Faiers,
John Issitt, Dylan Nykamp,
Joan Sinanan, and the Officers

Colton's Hospital Trustees:
Nicky Jenkins (Chair),
Elizabeth Faiers (Treasurer),
Stephanie Bisby, Dee Boyle,
Joan Sinanan, Mike Tyler,
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Please send your contributions for the next issue to Stephanie.

