



# THE YORK UNITARIAN

St. Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York, YO1 8NQ

February 2021

## FROM THE MINISTER

### Something Gained

Who'd have imagined twenty years ago that every Saturday afternoon it would be possible to sit in your living room and enjoy learning new hymns and singing familiar ones alongside Unitarians from all over the UK, in a session coordinated by leaders in York (Myrna Michell) and Newcastle (Louise Rogers)? Even a year or two ago, it wasn't a possibility that had crossed my mind, although video-conferencing technology had existed – and I'd even been using it for work – for much of my adult life.

In our Sunday service on 17<sup>th</sup> January I talked about how challenges can cause us to develop new strength, but I didn't say much about how this phenomenon is showing up right now in the Unitarian movement, so to remedy that omission I'd like to mention some of the opportunities that are currently available. I know many of the York congregation are active in these groups, and others – if I've missed your favourite, please let me know and I'll mention it next month!

Each Monday evening, those with an interest in the Bible can join a discussion about a chosen passage, its history and meaning, and how we might (or might not) choose to apply it

in our lives. Leaders and participants come from all over the country, both within and outside Unitarianism – though numbers are slightly depleted on alternate weeks when Rory Castle-Jones in Wales and Andy Pakula in London run an online course on *Leading Change in The Congregation* (admissions are now closed for this one, but you can read along with the course text of the same title, by Gilbert Rendle). The Yorkshire Unitarian Union offers regular opportunities for chapel-goers across the region to get together for worship and chat.



Many of these events are on Zoom, but if you don't like Zoom, there's also a great selection of services on youtube and facebook. Cross Street Chapel in Manchester even has an audio-only service on a platform called mixlr – it's just like listening to the radio! Many of our chapels may be closed in person, but lively discussion continues in the UK Unitarians facebook group, and both the General Assembly and various chapels

across the country share snippets of spiritual wisdom and links to online events on Instagram.

This month I'd like to give the last word to the spiritual wisdom of singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell from the beautiful song *Both Sides Now*: "Well something's lost, but something's gained, in living every day."

Stephanie Bisby

**A MONTH OF SUNDAYS  
at 10.30a.m.**

Sunday 7 February  
Jenny Jacobs  
*The undeserving poor*  
Music by David Hammond  
Zoom host: Janet Eldred

Sunday 14 February  
The Revd. Stephanie Bisby  
*What's in a name?*  
Music by Helen Drewery  
Zoom host: David Zucker

Sunday 21 February  
Meike Dux-Harrap  
*Creative life forces -  
based on Dr. Zhivago by Boris Pasternak*  
Music by David Hammond  
Zoom host: David Zucker

Sunday 28 February  
The Revd. Stephanie Bisby  
*How much is enough?*  
Music by Myrna Michell  
Zoom host: David Zucker

**LINKS TO ZOOMED EVENTS**

**Uni-Sing on facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/687366168770017>  
and on the web <https://sites.google.com/view/ring-of-voices/uni-sing>

**Bible Discussion Group on facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/689768408524659>  
and on the web: <https://unitarianbiblediscussion.blogspot.com/>

**Yorkshire Unitarian Union events:** <https://www.unitariansinyorkshire.org.uk/events/>

**List of online services:** <https://www.unitarian.org.uk/online-services>  
fbclid=IwAR1IISCD8I\_ZxDaBjYirB8ZtpDkOAEc5\_1VPvBethu5p1PRFcbEIPENpt7U

**UK Unitarians on facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/5434252796>

**UK Unitarians on instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/ukunitarians/>

**Joni Mitchell singing Both Sides Now:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OP8M0jhsM74>

**OTHER EVENTS IN FEBRUARY\_**

**Chapel Meditation Group**  
**11.00 on Thursdays**  
details from Dee Boyle  
deeboyle@gn.apc.org  
or phone 01904 621568

**Chapel Poetry Group**  
**7.00p.m. Last Wednesday  
of the month**  
details from Dee Boyle  
as above

**UNITARIAN GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
2021**

This year's GA Annual Meetings in Birmingham have been cancelled for safety reasons.

**AGM and Business Meeting**

- However we do need to have the business meeting which will be held on Zoom over a single day, Saturday 24 April.
- There will be about 4 hours of 'business' split across multiple sessions with breaks in between. Voting will take place online through a different programme.
- Agenda, Standing Orders, Annual Report (when available in March) and any general reports will be made available through our website in due course.

**Registration**

- You will need to register on-line in advance by 03 April. It will be free.
- As with the normal meetings, we will need to check voting eligibility and create voter lists.
- We will need to send login details to those people in advance to allow them to vote, as well as making papers available.

**Other events making up the Annual Meetings?**

- We will arrange a separate Anniversary Service, at a different time also on Zoom. This is will not require pre-registration.
- We will not be running the usual Affiliated Society events, or training sessions, workshops or lectures. We intend to run a number of such events over several months instead also on Zoom.
- Some of the Affiliated Societies may also run their own events online. We'll advertise these through *Uni-News* and on the GA website.

## FROM THE MINISTER'S BOOKSHELF

A number of people have asked me about books that I've mentioned during services. In our New Year service I mentioned *Care of the Soul* by Thomas Moore as a book which has been a big influence on my spiritual development. Johann Hari's book *Lost Connections* is more controversial but an interesting challenge to our society's reliance on pharmaceutical solutions to mental health issues. Casper ter Kuile's *The Power of Ritual* is a fascinating study of what our secular world is learning from religious practice. (Casper was a speaker at *Being Together*, the online Unitarian annual meetings last year). I also quoted, as I often do, from the Lindsay Press collection of daily readings, *Fragments of Holiness*, edited by Catherine Robinson. I won't repeat my recommendations from 17<sup>th</sup> January, as the address is reprinted elsewhere in the newsletter.

Stephanie Bisby

## WE ARE UNITARIANS

- 1st, because our own reason and conscience are the foundations of our religion;
- 2nd, our religion is the foundation of our life;
- 3rd, we need the support and companionship of people following the same way;
- 4th, we need the embodiment of our kind of religion in church, and worship and ministerial leadership.
- 5th, we are Unitarians because we need a climate of tolerance for our faith;
- 6th, because we must have unlimited freedom to follow where reason and conscience lead us;
- 7th, because we cannot separate our beliefs from our actions, and
- 8th because the world as a whole needs the principles we need for our faith.

The Unitarian way in religion and life is not for everyone; we do not send out missionaries to convert all men [and women] to our way; but in every generation there are some who need this way; as knowledge grows there are probably more and more who need this way; and for those who find it, and follow it faithfully, it may be hard sometimes, but is never confining, and ultimately, we know it to be rewarding beyond price.

Bruce Findlow

## FROM THE CHAPEL COMMITTEE

- The Chapel Committee met after service on Sunday 17 January. *Rev. Stephanie Bisby* was welcomed to her first meeting. She will present written reports to each meeting. Also she will meet with the pastoral care group and meet with *Dee Boyle* (authorised person for marriages) about weddings. There will be an induction service for Stephanie when the present pandemic restrictions are over and we are back in the Chapel.

- It was agreed not to reopen the Chapel at present and to continue the current arrangements for 'zoomed' services.

- *Steve Crowther* will be asked to review the Chapel hiring charges and to make recommendations regarding showing potential hirers around.

- *David Zucker*, chairperson, introduced 4 quotations (£18,000 to £40,000) for installing wi-fi and broadcasting equipment into the Chapel. After a presentation by *Barbara Barnes* it was agreed to start rather more modestly.

- *Nick Morrice* will finish his time as Chapel treasurer at the AGM. *Richard Brown* will be proposed as his successor. Current holdings with CafBank (day to day business) £40,237; with CCLA (permanent 'ethically invested' endowment) £561,000. An examiner has been appointed for this year's accounts.

- The Committee is looking for a new Chapel Word Press web page editor. The current DUWIT team wish to handover.

- A membership application from *Margaret Issitt* was unanimously accepted. Also *Myrna Michell* was appointed as membership secretary.

- The Pastoral Care team's report was accepted.

- *Dee Boyle* proposed that there should be a couple of 'on line' emergency service scripts available. Meanwhile there 2 'paper based scripts are to be found in the Chapel vestry filing cabinet.

- *Andrew Hill* will continue as pulpit secretary until the year's end. He will consult with the minister.

- *Jenny Jacobs* has been proposed for membership of the General Assembly Executive. The congregation will support the proposal.

- *Melissa Brannigan*, who has faithfully cared and cleaned the chapel for many years has retired. We need to find a replacement.

## RING OF VOICES



We, Myrna Michell and Louise Rogers, started in June 2020 with Uni-Sing! to keep ourselves singing hymns whilst also keeping safe at home. We have now had more than 30 sessions. We meet via Zoom @ 3.00 p.m. every Saturday afternoons. Everyone is welcome.

We have a website [www.ring-of-voices.net](http://www.ring-of-voices.net) – all the details about what we do can be found there. Please get in touch with any queries.

This year alongside Uni-Sing! we are running some Monday night sessions entitled, Voices In The Air. There are six sessions planned at the moment – more will be planned once we have some feedback from those attending.

There are two types of session:

- (1) Singing a variety of aspirational songs not found in our hymn books; and
- (2) Learning a bit about how to use music, and some more technical aspects of singing.

The dates are:

**Singing workshops :**

February 1st, March 1st, March 29th @ 7pm-8.15pm

**Music workshops :**

February 15th @ 7pm-8.15 pm - Signposts of music-reading

March 15th @ 7pm-8.15 pm - Adding a simple harmony

April 19th @ 7pm-8.15 pm - Writing our own hymns and songs

We are encouraging composers and writers of hymns to contact us, so that we may share their work and help them if they need a bit of support to get writing and/or composing.

If anyone has any ideas about future sessions or projects please do contact us Myrna: [ringofvoices@gmail.com](mailto:ringofvoices@gmail.com) & Louise: [louise.rogers256@gmail.com](mailto:louise.rogers256@gmail.com) Myrna Michel

## ST. CRUX FUNDRAISING DAY 2021

Our 2021 fundraising day for Chapel funds at St. Crux Hall (Stonebow end of Whip-Ma-Whap-Ma Gate) is scheduled to be on Saturday 16th October (subject to government restrictions at the time)



*Marta Hardy at the bookstall*

During lockdown  
can you make something to sell?



We need crafts, art, practical items  
- anything which will sell.

Also new gifts  
(perhaps those unwanted ones from Christmas), good quality bric-a-brac and pre-loved books - now is the time to sort these out.

## BROKEN STRINGS

The sermon by Stephanie Bisby  
on Sunday 17 January

### REBUILDING THE MINSTER

I must have been about ten when I came to York for the first time. At that point in my life, my family were living near Swindon in Wiltshire, and we decided to get up early one day – presumably in the school holidays – to make the 200 mile trip to York. I'm not sure if this is the real reason, but my memory is that we did this because I'd become fascinated with York Minster after watching a segment on Blue Peter about the installation of the new roof bosses which had been created based on entries to their competition. I loved the colours and variety of designs. I was particularly taken with one based on the raising of the Mary Rose, which had been a huge local news story when I was younger and living near Portsmouth. But looking back I think what I loved most was the idea that the fire which could so easily have ruined everything became the catalyst for something new and wonderful which would in its turn become part of York's lasting heritage.

Once I moved up to Yorkshire, I came to York much more frequently for all sorts of reasons. I hadn't thought about that first visit for a long time, until recently when the BBC shared some eerily beautiful drone footage of Christchurch Cathedral in New Zealand, which was damaged in the 2011 earthquake. The original plan was to demolish it, but in 2017 the decision was made to rebuild instead. The new building will have rubber bearings built into the foundations to allow it to move around independently of its surroundings, making it more resistant to tremors and earthquakes.

### FLAWED MARBLE AND BROKEN STRINGS

There are lots of stories that attest to the resilience of the human spirit, and our ability to 'build back better'. There's the story of the lute player in Patrick Rothfuss' epic fantasy novel *The Name of the Wind*, coaxing beautiful melodies from a damaged instrument. Then there's the story told about the creation of Michaelangelo's sculpture of David. It's said David was carved from a single block of marble which had been discarded as unusable by Donatello 50 years earlier because of a flaw, but it was the shape and location of this flaw which suggested the statue's distinctive pose.

Generations of artists, musicians and architects have showed us that our biggest limitations can inspire our greatest triumphs; that we are at our most creative when finding ways to work in a flawed and faulty environment, which is a good thing, given the 'bruised and broken world' we're living in now. From Brexit to Trump to climate change and coronavirus, our starting point is flawed in ways that ten-year-old me, looking up at the shiny bosses in York Minster, couldn't have begun to imagine. If we had the choice, I think quite a lot of us might choose to chuck out the block of marble that is 'the state of things in 2021' and pick a new one, but we don't have that option. For better or worse, the world we work with now is the sum of all the choices and the actions and events of human history leading up to this point.

### BOUNCING BACK

It's not an easy starting point. Karen Armstrong writes in *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*: "We are unable to deal with the massive problems of hunger and poverty; we know that our environmental policies are unsustainable and yet we cannot seem to find a viable way of dealing with them. We look around us and realise that something needs to be done, yet find no immediate solution."

No wonder that resilience is such a popular term in wellbeing literature at present. The world right now isn't kind to fragility, so it's helpful that we've become aware of the need to build robustness into individuals and organisations. In *Antifragile*, Nassim Nicholas Taleb puts forward glass as the archetypal image for fragility. We could perhaps point to rubber as something resilient: as simple a construction as a child's toy ball has the ability to bounce back; the harder it's thrown down, the harder it comes back up. But Taleb goes beyond this to something else, something more than just the ability to come back from a hit; more than just muddling through, getting along, surviving it. He suggests that we may be able to use challenges as a spur to growth.

Ryan Holliday writes in *The Obstacle is the Way*, "Sports psychologists recently did a study of elite athletes who were struck with some adversity or serious injury. Initially, each reported feeling isolation, emotional disruption and doubts about their athletic ability. Yet afterward, each reported gaining a desire to help others, additional perspective, and

realization of their own strengths. In other words, every fear and doubt they felt during the injury turned into greater abilities in those exact areas.

It's a beautiful idea. Psychologists call it adversarial growth and post-traumatic growth." Nicholas Nassim Taleb calls this phenomenon 'anti-fragility' and goes on to write "I hold – it is beyond speculation, rather a conviction – that innovation and sophistication spark from initial situations of necessity, in ways that go far beyond the satisfaction of such necessity." This belief leads to an attitude which takes us beyond problem-solving into what we might call problem-surmounting – using the problem as a spur to create something new and better. It requires clarity of vision; courage; and a willingness to engage with the situation as it really is and to go beyond the obvious answers. It also requires compassion. Here's Karen Armstrong again: "...we should not approach our task with the harsh zeal of a reformer; there should be no anger, frustration or impatience in our survey. We must look at our community with compassion, estimate its strengths and its weaknesses, and assess its potential for change."

#### THE COST OF CHANGE

Gilbert Rendle wrote in *Leading Change in the Congregation*, "Because of the complexity of our lives, congregations will be travelling different directions and will experiment with new and different forms of congregational life and ministry as they seek to share faith with people in this time of changing assumptions and paradigms." And that was in 2007, long before the pandemic catapulted us at high speed into a world of online worship and meetings. Interestingly, although it had obviously been planned earlier, it was in February last year, just as the pandemic began to take hold, that the General Assembly convened a course called *The Art of Hosting*, aimed at providing congregations and their leaders with a number of tools which would help in adapting to the needs of a changing society, tools designed to provide a deep insight into the hopes and fears each of us brings to our faith community, though Gilbert Rendle suggests that most of these can be categorised simply into two overarching themes: fear of too little change (trying to 'steer a parked car') and fear of too much change (of 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater').

There is always a cost associated with change. Even, as Bob Janis-Dillon, Congregational Connections Lead for the Unitarian General Assembly, suggests in his latest blog, a sacrifice. He writes "This word "sacrifice" may not always be very popular in liberal religious congregations, harkening back to arcane pagan rituals or the ransom theory of atonement. But by sacrifice, I simply mean that change is hard, and usually – almost always, actually – there is a cost to change. You need to let something go in one area, in order to grow in another."

Sometimes we have a choice about what to let go. Other times, circumstances hand us the loss – just now, the loss of safe in-person meetings – and our only choice is how to respond to it. And I think, with our growing tech skills, investment in equipment, and increasing connections across geographic boundaries, we are beginning to show that "innovation and sophistication spark from initial situations of necessity, in ways that go far beyond the satisfaction of such necessity."

We can create beauty from a flawed block of marble. We can rebuild a cathedral from the ruins with new strength. We can take our broken strings, and learn to play a new song, a song of courage and hope.



## GLOBAL CHALICE LIGHTING

### January

These words are offered by the Hungarian Unitarian Church in honour of the anniversary of the Edict of Torda.



#### Hungarian

A lángot azok emlékére gyújtjuk, akik előttünk járva, alapot vetettek közösségeinknek a szabadság, a szeretet, a türelem szellemében és bizonyosságot tettek arról, hogy a fény legyőzi a sötétséget.

“A hit isten ajándéka. A hitnek ismertető igaz jele a benső tisztaság, a szeretet, a külső jámbor élet és jó cselekedetek. A szeretet a törvény összessége és vége. Krisztus szerint a törvény teljessége a szeretetben áll. A szeretet királyi törvény. A szeretet a valódi szabadság, mihez a szolgaság félelme nem járul. A szeretet a világ éltető lelke, a jók legfőbb kincse.” (Dávid Ferenc)

#### English

We light this chalice in remembrance of those who laid down the foundation of our communities in the spirit of freedom, love and tolerance, to remember that true light will outshine darkness:

“Faith is the gift of God. The true signs of faith are an inner purity and love and an honest life and good deeds. Love is the ultimate interpretation and completion of the law. According to Jesus love is the plenitude of the law. Love is a royal commandment. Love is the true freedom, which does not bear the bondage of fear. Love is the creative spirit of the world, the highest treasure of humankind.” (Francis David, founder of the Hungarian Unitarian Church – XVIth century)

## UNI-NEWS JANUARY 2021

**Do Congregations Dream?** Watch the latest video from our Congregational Connections Lead, Rev Bob Janis-Dillon. This month, he is facilitating conversations around getting the best from online worship, and he wants to hear your reflections on [his recent essay on congregational growth!](#)

**Worship Studies Course (Online)** Are you interested in leading Unitarian services? Unitarian College is offering an online course for all interested in conducting high quality worship. Led by Unitarian ministers and experienced lay people, the course will run over eight sessions. [Find out more.](#)

#### Findhorn Unitarian Network

You are warmly invited to the following online meditation sessions, organised led by Laura Dobson on 20 February at 10am and on 23 February at 9.30 am)

#### Need help using Zoom?

Rev Stephanie Bisby has created these useful guides, which you can also find on our [website](#): [Beginners Guide to Zoom for Church](#), [Making your first Zoom meeting](#), and [Hosting in Zoom](#). Thank you Stephanie!

#### Coronavirus Latest Guidance

on the Coronavirus page of our [website](#). See also the useful guidance from the [Interfaith Network](#).

#### Online services

We are inspired by the way that due to the Coronavirus pandemic, many of our congregations have moved quickly to offering online services on Sundays and during the week, so that people can stay connected. And now's your chance to 'visit' another congregation! You can find a full list on our [website](#).

**Destroying species is like  
tearing pages out of an unread book,  
written in a language humans hardly  
know how to read,  
about the place where they live.  
[Holmes Rolston III]**

## UNITARIAN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### New Website

The Unitarian General Assembly has a new web site at [www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk).

## YORKSHIRE UNITARIAN UNION

### Social Nights

#### Wednesday 10 February at 7.00p.m.

Over the last few months the YUU has had zoomed lunch-time sessions for candles of joy and concern. As things have progressed it has been decided to switch all sessions to fortnightly on Wednesday evenings at 7.00p.m. and incorporate more into them: a mixture of sharing on a theme, time for candles of joys and concerns and some chit-chat. Sessions will still open and close mindfully and prayerfully.

### ZOOM LINK

Topic: YUU Social Evening

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83470886465?pwd=aVg3V0F0VFN5ckRhMXlEek1iNnBMdz09>

Meeting ID: 834 7088 6465

Passcode: 991080

### ABOUT PEOPLE

*John Howe writes from Boston, USA:*

My thoughts will be with you and the York Unitarians as you open your service on Sunday with words from William Ellery Channing. Through his ministry he brought an encouraging message of hope to the world, very much in contrast to the dour New England Puritans who had preceded him. His tomb at Mount Auburn Cemetery is a short walk from where we live in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Just a few weeks ago, I took a group of our church's youth on a walk by that spot as we visited the gravesites of a dozen or so early leaders of the abolitionist movement in America.

Please give my regards to the entire congregation. May we offer each other encouragement during these traumatic times. Goodness knows we Americans need it right now! Best regards, *John Howe*

**A person has no religion  
who has not slowly  
and painfully gathered it together,  
adding to it, shaping it;  
one's religion is never complete and  
final it seems, but must always be  
undergoing modification.**

***D.H.Lawrence***

## USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS



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*Chapel Committee Members:*,  
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Brown, Elizabeth Faiers, Andrew Hill,  
Margaret Hill, Joan Sinanan, and the  
Officers

*Colton's Hospital Trustees*  
Elizabeth Faiers (Treasurer), Dee Boyle,  
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Nicky Jenkins (Chair), Joan Sinanan,  
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