



# THE YORK UNITARIAN

*St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York, YO1 8NQ*

**May 2022**

## ***From the Minister***

When I sat down to write this month's letter, I expected it to be a very positive one. I'd just enjoyed the buoyant atmosphere of the first Unitarian General Assembly's annual meetings in person after two years of missed and online meetings. Among the joys of the event were finally having the opportunity to be officially welcomed onto the Roll of Ministers (along with Revs Robin Hanford, Rory Castle-Jones, Melda Grantham and Mark Hutchinson, below). There were also some excellent work-



shops: I have already mentioned Erika Hewitt's in a Sunday service, and Jenny Jacobs and Jo James's session on welcome as a spiritual practice also warrants a special mention. Sadly I missed the celebration of David Dawson's life and music led by Nick Morrice for the Unitarian Music Society, but I'm told it was recorded so I'm sure we'll have an opportunity to watch it at a later date. Another joy this year was being present as the Assembly voted to affirm the rights of trans people, having heard the moving real life stories of several trans Unitarians. This motion was put forward by the FOY Society

(<https://ukunitarians.org.uk/foy/index.htm>), a

group which has evolved a good deal since its inception in 1924 as the Fellowship of Youth. It's now an intergenerational group which aims to balance fun and fellowship with consideration of important social issues. FOY's annual conference took place at the Nightingale Centre in Derbyshire the weekend following the annual meetings, and I managed to attend for the day on Saturday. Ian Minter from Birmingham New Meeting presented the results of his research



into deaths in custody in the UK, particularly through restraint, making it clear that deaths like that of George Floyd not only can but do occur on our own shores - an issue which has recently been powerfully addressed in a Young Adult novel by Unitarian author Marta Pacini: *The Unlawful Killing of Daniel Brown*. Lest we think that these failings are specific to the police, Rev Winnie Gordon from Birmingham shared her sobering study into the experiences of BIPOC people in our congregations. Yes, there is much good news to share, but we can't stop there. We also have to acknowledge the work still to be done.



## A MONTH OF SUNDAYS at 11am

**May 1, Stephanie Bisby,**  
*The Cosmic Dance*  
Music: Laura Jones

**May 8, Richard Brown,**  
*Who are We to Judge?*  
Music: Nick Morrice

**May 15, Stephanie Bisby,**  
*The Long Loneliness*  
Music: David Hammond

**May 22, David Zucker, Love**  
Music: David Hammond

**May 29, Rev Claire MacDonald,**  
*Being Here Now:*  
*Living an Enchanted Life*  
Music: Nick Morrice

**June 5, Stephanie Bisby,**  
*Being Together*  
Music: David Hammond

Claire MacDonald writes:

How do we find a way to 'be here now' in simplicity, joy and commitment to the common good? This service explores the sacred, the meaningful and the need for belonging through thinking about the idea of 'enchantment' - '...nothing to do with fantasy, or escapism, or magical thinking' according the writer Sharon Blackie, more '... a vivid sense of belongingness to a rich and many-layered world; a profound and whole-hearted participation in the adventure of life.' In this service, with music, readings and conversation, we explore what living an enchanted life might be and how touching on enchantment might bring us closer to what Thich Nhat Hanh calls our home in the present moment.



## THE INIQUITY OF “OFFSHORE PROCESSING”

It was in 2001 that the Australian government first entered into an arrangement with the government of Nauru for that island to become a dumping ground for refugees trying to enter Australia by boat. With a short break this arrangement continued up until present times. In 2021 a further agreement was signed to keep the facility available. Nauru is a tiny island in the Pacific ocean.

It is Australian government policy that no person who attempts to arrive in the country by boat, seeking asylum, is ever settled in Australia. Instead, they are sent to Nauru, or to Papua New Guinea’s Manus Island, for “offshore processing” which is in reality mandatory detention for people who have committed no crime.

This is no place to detail the horrific treatment of these refugees except to quote Dr Peter Young, formerly the chief psychiatrist responsible for the care of asylum seekers in detention on Manus and Nauru, who described the camps as “inherently toxic” and said the immigration department deliberately harmed vulnerable detainees in a process akin to torture.

In the company of other members of our Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Melbourne, Ralph and I have taken part in two protest marches against the harsh treatment of those seeking refuge in Australia.

It was with great horror to learn that inspired by Australia's inhumanity, the UK plans to send refugees to Rwanda for processing. If applicants were to be successful they would be allowed to stay in Rwanda. If unsuccessful they will be returned to their country of origin from which they had fled. On the signing of the agreement the organisation HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH said “Rwanda’s appalling human rights record is well documented”. It goes on to report, that last year the UK directly raised its concerns about respect for human rights with Rwanda, and grants asylum to Rwandans who have fled the country.

How can we stand by and do nothing when our democratically elected government is choosing, in our name, to act with cruelty and rip up their obligations to those fleeing war and persecution?

Sue Catts  
Member, York Unitarians



## DIARY DATES

*Thursdays at 11am*, congregational meditation group in Chapel and on zoom, contact Dee or Stephanie for details

*Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May*, York Interfaith, 6.30pm Refugees in York, in the Snow Room at City of York Council Offices

*Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> May, 1pm*, Late Music Concert, Spelk

*Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> May, 7.30 pm* Delta Saxophone quartet

*Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May*, Friday Lunchtime Concert, Ruth and James Sanderson, violin/piano

*Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> May*, poetry group, contact Dee for details

*Friday 27<sup>th</sup> May*, Lunchtime concert, Helen Drewery, piano

*Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2pm* Induction Service for Stephanie Bisby led by Rev Ant Howe

### Looking further ahead:

Stall at York Pride: *Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June*

York Unitarians 350th Anniversary Celebrations: *Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> & Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July*

St Crux fair: *Friday 8<sup>th</sup> July*

Yorkshire Unitarian Union Summer Gathering: *Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> July* at Scarborough.



## CHAPEL ARCHIVES

Nick Morrice and I recently conveyed four heavy boxes of chapel archives - containing about 150 different files - to join other chapel archives already deposited with the Borthwick Institute for Archives - University of York. You may wonder 'why the Borthwick?' rather than the more convenient York City Archives at the Central Library. Well, the answer is simple. When the original deposit of chapel archives was made - minute books, account books, title deeds and so on - the Borthwick Institute was very conveniently located in St. Anthony's Hall just walking distance around the corner from the chapel. Today, the Borthwick is located in its own purpose built building adjacent to the University of York library. 'Google' the Borthwick's website; find your way to its catalogue and you will find the schedule of all chapel archives within the Borthwick's care. For the care and cataloguing of our archives at the Borthwick the chapel owes a special debt of gratitude to archivist Sally-Anne Scheman.

The recent deposit included four additional collections of chapel archives amounting to about 150 documents. One of these collections was a boxful of documents discovered in the Chapel's upper room on a spring clean/'tidy-up' day (c 2008). A second collection was a recovered from a firm of local solicitors who served the chapel over several generations. A third collection was returned a few years ago from a private source and contained material which may well have been used as evidence in the 1899 court case - but, unfortunately not the original 1692 chapel trust deed which remains missing!; and a fourth collection being a bundle of correspondence from Unitarian HQ in London which also relates to the 1899 court case [for details of this case see my article in Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society 36:1 (2015)].

There is also a fifth box of non-deposited documents relating to recently past and present concerns and which really needs a safe and secure place on the chapel premises rather than in a chapel member's home. Maybe the chapel committee could provide a special locked cupboard with limited access, in the upper room? Andrew M. Hill

## Jenny Jacobs' sermon - March 20th

My text today is "Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Job 5:7

These words are spoken by Eliphaz, one of Job's "comforters". His thesis is that although we all face trials, God brings relief to the innocent and only the wicked fall. The entire book of Job is, in fact, a riposte to this thesis; it shows that bad things do happen to good people, and misfortune falls on all, no matter how virtuous they may be - and there may be no relief. But at the point in his speech where Eliphaz says that Man is born to trouble, he acknowledges that tribulation is in fact universal. This harks back to Genesis, when Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden, when humanity is born out of myth and into reality, and God says that Adam's life shall henceforth be one of hard labour with unfriendly ground, and Eve shall give birth in pain. To be human is to suffer.

So Man is born to trouble – but the simile is one of beauty. Sparks fly upward – I am transported to all those Guy Fawkes nights of my youth, or the camp fires with the Girl Guides, and I am standing in the darkness, my eyes fixed on the mesmerising glow of the fire, the dancing flames, and the sparks that break free and dance upwards into the night sky. The author could have chosen other similes if he was looking to suggest a weary inevitability. Man is born to trouble, as night follows day, perhaps. But no – man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. There is beauty in that image, the inevitability, sure, but also an idea of breaking free and soaring Heavenwards. So this is not as straightforwardly downbeat as it may appear.

I doubt there is anyone alive who hasn't experienced some sort of trouble or pain. Amongst my own small circle of friends, we have dealt with painful divorce, bullying at work, the sudden loss of a parent, a child with a disability, life-threatening illness and watching a parent's long slow death from cancer in one case, dementia in another. Not one of us has got off scot free. Death, sickness, violent crime, insidious bullying, poverty and the endless struggle to make ends meet – sometimes life seems relentlessly difficult and some people seem, unfairly, to bear so much more of their share of the bad stuff than others.

But humanity is a dauntless species. We are remarkable for our ability to survive knockbacks, for our resilience, for our ultimate faith in life, for our belief that better times might be just around the corner, and that however bad life can be, it is, for almost all of us, better than the alternative.

So yes, we are born to trouble. But on the whole we cope with it. And to be human is so much more than that! It is also to feel joy, love, friendship, creativity, empathy, inspiration, pleasure, intellectual prowess, job satisfaction even. How, after all, could we experience job satisfaction if everything came to us without any effort on our part? And how can we appreciate beauty if we don't have anything ugly with which to compare it? How can we enjoy the wonderful lassitude after extreme physical exertion if we haven't expended intense effort in the first place? How do we experience those moments when we can feel our minds expanding if we haven't first wrestled with some difficult mathematical or philosophical problem? (Or even today's Wordle.)

Humans do actually enjoy work. We like to get to grips with problems, whether mental or physical. We like to engage our brains and work out solutions. We enjoy helping others and get great satisfaction from alleviating suffering, whether through our own skills, or through raising and donating money to charities which help those who may be far away from us and suffering worse problems. We have vivid imaginations, we can envisage new and better ways of doing things, and we are at our most fulfilled when all parts of us, physical, mental and spiritual, are engaged and active. When we are working – and working well.

But life isn't just about work! It's also about taking time out to appreciate the beauty of music, of great art and architecture, of the natural world. We are surrounded by things that make the heart soar – these things differ for each one of us. My older son, for example, finds himself in tune with industrial wastelands (at least, that's what they look like to me!). For my younger son, it's cats, especially his cat Phoebe, and drawing. One friend's favourite thing is dancing around her kitchen to disco music which I can't abide. For me, it's the soul-ravishing music of the baroque when I'm playing with my recorder group every week. And mountains, even if I'm only seeing them on TV in nature programmes. Roses. Light streaming in through stained glass windows. Great coffee. The company of friends. I won't go on. You'll all of you have your lists. Think about them for a moment... And for all of us, amidst the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, one of the secrets to a happy, fulfilled life is to get off the merry-go-round every so often and find the time to just be.

To forget about the to-do lists, the endless chores, the daily duties which can overwhelm us, and to go deep into nature, to pay attention. As both W H Davies and Mary Oliver remind us life is not worth living unless we stop and stare, unless we open our eyes and observe what is right under our noses or up above our heads but is so easy to miss. And the great thing about these experiences is, they are freely available to every one of us. It might not be a field of cows or a field of grasshoppers – we can't all access fields – but it could just as easily be the nightingale singing in Berkeley Square. Or an urban fox slinking past the dustbins. All we need to do is stop and pay attention and allow the radiance of the natural world to shine upon us in all its glory. The lockdown in 2020 gave many of us the opportunity to do just that and some people found their priorities shifting as a result.

We discovered (if we didn't already know it) that we do have to engage, to focus, to give ourselves fully to the moment, even when those moments are hard. Even when we find ourselves lost in the wilderness. We have to give ourselves and risk failure, risk pain and re-buffs. We cannot live, we cannot love without sorrow.

And we can't avoid trouble by hiding away and **not** engaging with the world. That just produces a different **sort** of pain – the stagnation of unfulfilment, the nagging knowledge that we are not living out our true potential, regrets once it's too late to do much about it. Living half a life is not the answer. Yes, we may get knocked back, not once, not twice, but repeatedly – we are born to trouble – but we must take heart, have courage, and show resilience.

Or as the late, great Jack Spong put it, we must live fully, love wastefully and be the best that we can be. Not just when life is going well but when we are being tested to our limits. The wilderness, it's worth remembering, is a place of tremendous growth. It's where we make and remake ourselves, we learn hard lessons, and we emerge stronger.

All that we achieve - the beauty, the acts of daring, the many small kindnesses, the art, the science, the works of our imaginations, all of that takes place within that short space of time within which, although we are born to trouble, like sparks we fly upward, illuminating the darkness.

So... Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward...? Yes, I say, Amen to that.

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## Interfaith event at Mansion House Report and pictures by Nicky Jenkins

The Mayor and Lady Mayor hosted a reception at the Mansion House for members of the York Interfaith Group. Unitarians were well represented, making up almost a table full. The Mayor explained the difficulties they had had and sympathised with faith groups for not being able to gather during the Pandemic. However they had been creative in finding alternative ways of doing things such as hampers for pensioners rather than the usual big lunch. He affirmed the importance of the work of the Interfaith Group and said the city wanted to support any initiatives we had to strengthen inclusivity. The Sheriff explained his theme for the year which was to encourage younger people into civic life, acting as trustees etc. Refreshments were provided by the Larder Table who train women prisoners for roles in the hospitality industry. The Mansion House was lit in yellow and blue in solidarity with Ukraine.



## Blown

By Sue Elliott

*'My mind is blowing'*

*(Ukrainian refugee, BBC Radio 4, March 5<sup>th</sup> 2022)*

A blown mind searches in the rubble  
of a wrecked life. In the chilly hours  
and minutes of uncertainty, she finds  
a single word. In wakeful hours  
it chases through burnt houses,  
strange bunting hanging  
from shattered windows.

A body, uncollected, lies wrapped warmly  
at the roadside.

Before, we couldn't catch the wind.  
The old trees, upended, litter the hills,  
their roots shredded like spaghetti,  
dangling across ancient lanes  
where branches clutch empty air.

But there, an old man bends on the shoreline.  
At an oblique angle he holds his camera.  
I stop, curious. He tells me he's  
*'trying to catch a wave as it breaks.'*

There are no answers in the wind,  
and on the shore the wave falls.  
The camera and the single word  
find something unspeakable.

*After 'Blowin' in the Wind' (Bob Dylan 1962) and 'In the  
chilly hours and minutes' (Donovan (1965)*

*February ends with the Russian invasion of Ukraine (it's  
only an exercise, he said), leaving millions homeless,  
seeking refuge alongside revenge. In the months pre-  
ceding, in our own country, four violent storms in quick  
succession, have left the landscape transformed, com-  
pared by some to the scenes of the Great War captured  
by artists. On a beautiful day at Beadnell, Northumber-  
land, the determined sea has calmed itself. We seek  
reassurance in the gentle breaking of white waves. I  
marvel too at the mind's capacity, amid suffering, to  
locate a world of meaning in a single word.*

## Unitarian General Assembly Meetings

I asked some of our members who attended the annual meetings in Birmingham for their impressions.

Nick Morrice said, "GA was, for me as a first timer, a mixed bag of somewhat overlong, heavy voting procedures on issues which I didn't always understand, and some really inspiring workshops, notably Taize chanting on the final morning, and "Community Power in Action" by Indra Khan. But what I enjoyed most was catching up with old friends and making new ones at tea breaks and meal times. Overall, it was a great experience, and I would recommend it as a way of seeing the broader picture of the Unitarian denomination, and being inspired in unexpected ways."

Laura Cox said, "It was my second time attending the meetings and I found it to be a very uplifting and cohesive experience. My biggest takehomes were the fluidity and fun we can bring to our services, and that there is a clear place for Unitarian community outreach in a fractured world."



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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***Please send your contributions for the next issue to Stephanie.***

