



THE YORK UNITARIAN

St. Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York, YO1 8NQ

September 2019

FROM THE MINISTER

Well I must say I have been feeling a bit Septemberish recently though it's still August in front page writing land. I am enjoying the cooler nights and the opportunity to go for a stroll in the rain. I like it to be cloudy, saves the eyes!

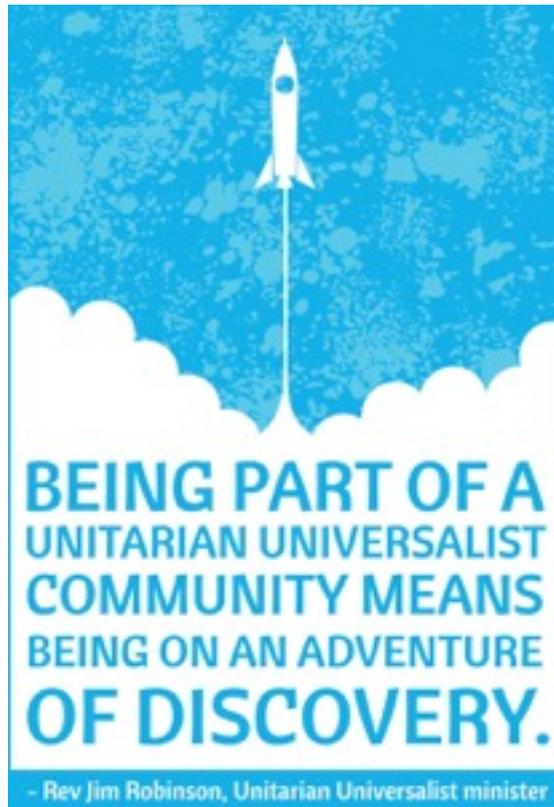
And I am, it seems, entering in to the September of my Ministry career. It's a thing that happens as you get older. You're poodling along, the children are getting older and suddenly you realise you are the age your grandfather died at. I used to love gambling. I was a slot machine addict at the seaside. I particularly liked the penny falls. You feed in your penny carefully to land just on a precarious heap which is certain to fall in its entirety bringing you riches beyond the dreams of avarice. Somehow it gets shoved to one side and you just know that it will only need another penny or two to get the adjacent heap to fall. Sometimes it did but most of the time it didn't! How many more half-crowns could I convert to pennies before the big win? I couldn't stay there indefinitely because I had to get the half-crowns from Mum or Dad. And everyone else wanted to enjoy the rest of the fair.

Of course I was young then. I believed in miracles and magic and wonderful unexpected outcomes. But my luck never changed. I never won big. And there comes a time when you don't want to do it anymore even though sometimes you think you would.

Anyhow, that's not about Ministry it's about gambling. It's about whether you assume that you will win if you just hang on a little longer or if you leave right now the next person who puts their penny in will cash in - on all your cash.

Many of my readers have already retired so you know what it's like and how you had to adjust. But I'm not willing to gamble that I can put it off indefinitely and I will live long enough or well enough to enjoy it. So I'm taking another gamble. That I will enjoy retirement and not live to rue the day I decided to no longer be bound by work hours. I want to be able to spend time with my husband and be able to visit my grown children when I need to. I am not afraid to lose my status and become someone who doesn't 'do' anything. Suits me!

Nicky Jenkins



**A MONTH OF SUNDAYS
at 11.00a.m.**

Sunday 1 September
Revd. Nicky Jenkins
Welcome back
Music by David Hammond

Sunday 8 September
Revd. Nicky Jenkins
Back to school
Music by Helen Drewery
Sparklers' Children's programme

Sunday 15 September
Nick Morrice
Me and my shadow
Music by David Hammond and
The Clerkes of All Saints

Sunday 22 September
Bright Lights Intergenerational worship
led by Claire Wilton
Not all those who wander are lost
Music by Laura Jones

Sunday 29 September
Dee Boyle
To be or not to be
Music by Nick Morrice
12.30 p.m. Committee Meeting

- Saturday 21 September 10.30a.m. *Sponsored Walk for My Sight York* (gather Husthwaite)
- Saturday 21 September 1.00p.m. *York Chamber Music: Tim Lowe (cello) and John Lenehan (piano)* playing Bach, Brahms and Boulanger
- Monday 23 September 7.30p.m. *Soon Amore rehearsal* (Chapel)
- Thursday 26 September 10.30 for 11.00a.m. *Meditation Group* (Upper Room)
- Friday 27 September 12.30p.m. *Last Friday concert Jonathan Hanley (tenor) and Nicky Losef (piano)* Die Schöne Müllerin
- Sunday 29 September 12.30p.m. Committee Meeting
- Monday 30 September 7.30p.m. *Soon Amore rehearsal* Chapel)

OTHER EVENTS IN SEPTEMBER

- Tuesday 3 September 7.30p.m. *York Interfaith Association: Environmental issues and faith responses* (Hudson Room, Council Offices)
- Thursday 5 September 10.30 for 11.00a.m. *Meditation Group* (Upper Room)
- Saturday 7 September 7.30p.m. *Late Music: Illuminate – Prism Trio* (Chapel)
- Monday 9 September 7.30p.m. *Soon Amore rehearsal* (Chapel)
- Thursday 12 September 10.30 for 11.00a.m. *Meditation Group* (Upper Room)
- Friday 13 September 12.30p.m. *Last Friday music: Helen Drewery (piano)* (Chapel)
- Monday 16 September 7.30p.m. *Soon Amore rehearsal* (Chapel)
- Thursday 19 September 10.30 for 11.00a.m. *Meditation Group* (Upper Room)
- Friday 20 September 1.00p.m. *York Chamber Music: Martyn Jackson (violin) and John Lenehan (piano)* playing Beethoven, Prokofiev and Grieg

GIFT AID ENVELOPES



The treasurer and the committee have been re-assessing the use of gift aid envelopes. A calculation has been made that we are well within the amount allowed by HMRC to claim under the Gift Aid Small Charitable Donations Scheme.

So it has been decided that we will discontinue the use of these envelopes since all donations made in this way may have 'gift aid' claimed on them anyway. Members and friends who pay by Standing Order will still need to have filled in Gift Aid Forms.

We would like to encourage the use of payments by Standing Orders as this makes the treasurer's duties much easier. Standing order and gift aid forms for *York Unitarians CIO* are available on the Chapel table, or can be e-mailed by the secretary.

The collection bag will still be taken around during the service and people who pay by Standing Order may wish to put a small donation in the collection bag, but this is voluntary.

Margaret Hill, secretary

FROM THE CHAPEL COMMITTEE

- The Chapel Committee met on Sunday 18 August. Apologies were received from *Dee Boyle, Laura Cox, Elizabeth Faiers, Simon Hardy* and *Nick Morrice*.
- The congregation is now officially on the Unitarian General Assembly's list of 'vacant pulpits'.
- *Peter Exley* and *Nick Morrice* have examined the 'bulging' street front wall. Peter's opinion is that it does not impose a structural risk. However, repointing of the side wall and repainting of the wrought iron fence is on 'the list'.
- The minister reported that the Chapel was on-line at the York 'Trip Advisor' website; that she had been appointed a 'spiritual advisor' with the York St. John University chaplaincy; and that her final pre-retirement Sunday at St. Saviourgate would be Sunday 12 January 2020.
- The 2018 Chapel accounts had been adopted by a general meeting of members of the congregation earlier that day.
- *Adie Wilson* has been appointed as assistant treasurer to help *Nick Morrice* with the current chapel accounts.
- Groups hiring the Chapel for concerts will be expected to pay their final payment within 7 days of their event. A new water contract has been signed.
- Gift Aid envelopes for Chapel collections will no longer be displayed on the Chapel pews since they are no longer necessary. Standing Orders should now be made out to 'York Unitarians CIO'.
- *Yorkshire Unitarian Union*: the chapel secretary reported that she was preparing the chapel's report for the YUU annual report and meeting. She also mentioned that no minutes of YUU general and executive meetings had been received for 12 months which made our being informed and up-to-date on YUU matters difficult.
- There had two applications for Chapel membership from *Keith Brown* and *John Issett*. These were approved.
- There was discussion about (i) the possibility of an interfaith cafe in inter-faith week in November and the best location for such an event; (ii) a Chapel social outreach suggestion of shared lunches with particular groups was discussed.

THE CHAPEL LIBRARY IS IN TWO LOCATIONS

The Chapel library is in two locations: books with a Unitarian theme, marked with a yellow dot, are mostly located on the lobby bookshelves, while other books are in the tall white bookshelf in the upper room. The colour of dot on the spines indicates category, with an explanation of each in the black Library ring-binder on the shelf by the window in the upper room. Members and attenders are welcome to borrow books and should enter details in one of the two loans books, one for each location. Visitors to the chapel may also borrow books but are requested to enter legible contact details also.

Every year, our annual stock-take reveals a number of missing books. These are books not traceable either due to not being entered in the loans book or where contact details are illegible or insufficient. Happily, a few of the books missing from previous years re-appear, but the balance is a steady loss.

This is a polite request to all of us to scour our shelves to see if books belonging to the Chapel are hiding, forgotten, in our homes. No explanation is necessary, simply put the stowaways on the table in the lobby so that their welcome return can be recorded. Thank you. *Barbara Barnes*

2019 SPONSORED WALK FOR CHARITY

The sponsored walk for our chosen charity, MySightYork, will be on Saturday 21st September starting at 10:30 a.m. from Husthwaite, a village about 2 miles to the east of the A19 north of Easingwold. (Please note: given wrongly as 'west' in the August newsletter!)

The route is 5½ miles over gently undulating countryside using good paths.

The village pub/restaurant should be open at the end of the walk!

If you are interested in joining the walk, you need to let us know and we will provide a sponsorship form.

Alan and Liz Pennington 01937 845575
alan.pennington@btinternet.com

If you do not wish to join the walk itself then please start collecting your pennies (or even better your pounds!) now to sponsor those participating in the walk. Alan Pennington

**DEMAND:
A MANDATE FOR CHANGE**

Extinction Rebellion York recently held a programme of events at York Explore. In the afternoon the Chapel had its own information table (thanks to Laura Cox for facilitating this); and in the evening several Chapel members and friends participated in a well facilitated People's Assembly producing a programme of environmental policies for submission to York City Council. The shorter of the two reports from the gathering follows.

On the 21st of March 2019, City of York Council declared a climate emergency and committed to going carbon neutral by 2030. At Extinction Rebellion York, we recognised that this was only a first step and needed to be followed up by definite policies and proposals. We also recognised that people must have a say in any kind of ecological transition. With that in mind, Demand a Future was born.

DEMAND A FUTURE

Demand a Future had two primary aims:

1. To hold a People's Assembly where the people of York could come together to produce a set of proposals for the council on the creation of a carbon neutral York
2. To get participation from as many groups and individuals throughout York as possible.

The People's Assembly, which was attended by over 400 people, came up with mandates for Movement, Economy, Housing, Energy, Food and Environment. The full mandates are laid out in the document, but we will summarise them here:

MOVEMENT

Pedestrianise the city centre (within the city walls), excluding disability access. Make public transport accessible and free, improve cycle lanes, and repair roads.

ECONOMY

Follow Circular Economy principles based upon wellbeing rather than economic growth. creating a culture of recycling and repair that values wellness above wealth. York Council should also be part of the One Million Climate Jobs initiative.

HOUSING

Housing should be sustainable, accessible, affordable, and meet high environmental standards.

ENERGY

Maximise sustainable generation by solar and wind power at national and local scale. Investigate local energy grid and storage solutions.

FOOD

Create a strategy for sustainable food through partnerships, and move towards local, sustainable food sourcing and packaging.

ENVIRONMENT

Take a radical, green-by-design approach to sustainable development, where people and environment come first. Including: education about green spaces, improved air quality, preserving ecosystems, and looking at carbon negative projects.

ONE PLANET YORK

Our final general mandate is to reinvigorate One Planet York. We look forward to seeing these changes implemented in York and thank you all for being here with us to put words into action

ABOUT PEOPLE

- *Adie Wilson, Nick Morrice, Jen Atkinson and Jenny Jacobs* all attended The Unitarian Music Society's annual weekend at the Nightingale Centre at Great Hucklow in Derbyshire.
- *Laura Cox* attended Summer School also at the Nightingale Centre.
- *Sue Catts*, along with *Ralph*, is off to Australia for the foreseeable future. We will miss them both and look forward to their return trips.
- Our best wishes go to *John Carter*, *Ralph's* successor, as minister of Hull Unitarians. John will be dividing his time between Hull, Boston and Lincoln.
- Special 'thank yous' go to *Joan Sinanan, Dee Boyle* and *Nicky Jenkins* for laundering the covers of chapel pew cushions.
- *Marta Hardy* has been on her annual trip home to Nebraska, USA.
- *Jenny Jacobs* was featured in the March 2019 edition 'Progressive Voices' as a trustee of the Progressive Christianity Network.

ARGUING WITH GOD

a sermon by Jenny Jacobs
on Sunday 14 July 2019

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, there are tales of encounters with God. While some individuals (Noah, Samuel) immediately respond positively to the divine summons, more often than not, the encounter is not one of unqualified cooperation; and in many cases, the encounter is one where, rather than saying “Thy will be done”, the human being challenges or argues with God.

Moses, Elijah, Jacob, Job, Jonah – all these, in different ways, argued with or challenged God. And the Psalms contain many challenges to God, mostly along the line of complaints about the wicked prospering while the good are going under.

GOD’S ARGUMENT WITH ABRAHAM

But the story I want to concentrate on, because it is so astounding, is God’s argument with Abraham in the book of *Genesis*. Now I’m not for one moment suggesting that this is a factually accurate account of an actual historical event. But that’s not the point. I don’t think that’s what we are supposed to understand by this story. And in fact, if it is not a historical narrative, then it’s even more important to wonder why it’s there. What are we intended to learn from it? And why am I harking back to this ancient Hebrew scripture? Because, just as it did for the Hebrews as they gathered together hundreds of years later and set their stories down, it contains important lessons for us here and now.

At first glance, the dialogue between Abraham and God shows the human being, with his repeated cry, “Far be it from you!” calling God to account and demanding justice from him. And Abraham is daring in his temerity; he persists. Having won from God the agreement that he will spare Sodom if he finds fifty righteous inhabitants, Abraham keeps going, upping the ante until God agrees finally that if he finds only ten righteous inhabitants, he will spare the city.

This, it seems, is mankind having a better understanding of justice than God himself, who appears to be contemplating destruction of an entire city even though innocent lives would be lost. As it turns out, God doesn’t find even ten righteous inhabitants, so Sodom and Gomorrah are both destroyed. Now you may be thinking that amongst the dead there would, no doubt, have been many innocent children. Women and slaves would not have been included in the reckoning of the righteous either. But pointing that out is looking at the story with 21st century eyes; I’m afraid we have to park that thought.

ABRAHAM AS GOD’S PROXY

So can it really be the case that Abraham knows better than God how to dispense justice? That conclusion would be to miss the point of the story. Consider this. The really remarkable passage comes right at the start. Here, God is shown having an inner dialogue over whether to engage Abraham in his decision when he says “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”

Why should God discuss his actions with any human being? Why would it matter to God? God’s answer to himself

is that he has chosen Abraham as a sort of proxy: “to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just”. Abraham has already been chosen as the father of the covenantal people. Now, God presents his proposed treatment of Sodom to Abraham almost as a training course on how to deal justly with the sort of difficult situation which he will face, if in a lesser form, as the father of the chosen nation.

And Abraham is equal to the task. He does not accept God’s word as final. Abraham argues with God, and wins concessions from him, not just once, not just twice, but six times. Each time, despite Abraham’s fears, God is not angry, but gives ground. It’s as if God wants Abraham to question and argue; not to accept what is presented at face value, but to dig down to what is right, and no matter how powerful the authority, to hold that authority to account and to fight for justice.

In effect, Abraham is being coached by God; and God encourages him by granting



concessions. God needs Abraham to be brave, to challenge and, above all, to fight for justice, even justice for the few (possible) innocent inhabitants of a place like Sodom. This is why God engages Abraham in the decision; to be sure that Abraham is the right man for him, fit to be the father of his chosen people. A man who will act as God's proxy, fighting for justice even in the face of insuperable odds.

According to this story, God needs Abraham, his chosen partner in the covenant, to fight fearlessly for justice no matter what the cost, and to understand through and through what justice means. Now whatever your understanding of God, and whether or not you have any sort of concept of God, what's important about this is not what God might or might not have said, but what the Jews' understanding of God meant, what their status was relative to God, and what it means to be "keeping the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just". No matter that as the books of the Bible unfold, again and again the people are shown to be falling short of this, and that again and again, the prophets are called to bring them back to the way of the Lord. What's important is that the Jews had at their heart the idea that to be walking in the way of the Lord meant to be living lives and creating a society that was fair and just.

GOD'S GIFTS ARE FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL

And another thing I love about this ancient story is that it gives the lie, forever and always, to that pathetic excuse for wrongdoing, "I was just following orders". This story tells us unequivocally that there is no authority so high that we should accept its edicts unquestioningly.

Incidentally, it's worth pointing out what the sin of those inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah actually consisted of – and it's not what you might be thinking. The sins of Sodom are referenced later on in the Bible in both *Isaiah* and *Ezekiel*. The latter puts it most succinctly when God says:

They were arrogant and spoiled; they had everything they needed and still refused to help the poor and needy. They thought they were better than everyone else, and they did things I hate. And so I destroyed them.

It was all about injustice. This is a living lesson which resonates strongly for us right here and now. The cities of the plain were destroyed by

fire and brimstone, although one might say that they brought their destruction on themselves. The seeds of their destruction were sown in their extravagant and selfish lifestyle. Could something similar be lying in wait for us? And do we have the time and the will to repent, to change our habits and avert disaster? The wider implication of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is that the gifts of God are not to be hoarded by the few but are to be used for the benefit of all.

LET JUSTICE ROLL DOWN LIKE WATERS

This story is in the very first book of the Bible, *Genesis*. It is foundational for the history of the Jews and their relationship with God. It enshrines justice at the heart of this relationship. This core value informs the entire Hebrew Bible and is the message brought to us again and again, most famously in Amos' impassioned plea,

"let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream".

Genesis is where it all begins. But it is still being worked out in all our lives today.

The story of Abraham pleading for the Sodomites shows us a God who expects his people to think for themselves, to work out what justice requires and to argue the toss if need be, not just once, not just twice, but until they are satisfied that justice has been done. This is a powerful lesson. The God depicted in the Hebrew Bible doesn't want abject self-abasement, he doesn't want yes-men, he doesn't want a people who mouth the letter of the law whilst failing to observe its spirit. We have been endowed with intelligence and a strong sense of fair play. We are expected to use these gifts, not just for our own advancement, but to bring all our human tribe along with us.

This was the understanding of God, of humanity, and of what was expected of both sides in their covenant by the people who set this unprecedented story down so many thousands of years ago. It is astonishing in its depth and insight.

The lesson is this; if we are to partner with God in building a world on Biblical principles of love and justice, then we are required to make use of all our abilities, to question received wisdom, to challenge authority where necessary, and to oppose injustice wherever it is found. It was true all those thousands of years ago when *Genesis* was written down and it's just as true today.



Yorkshire Unitarian Union
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
26th October 2019

Featuring a presentation from:-

Rory Castle Jones
Communications Officer
At
Essex Hall




TIME & VENUE
10am to 4:00pm
at Hull Unitarian Chapel,
Chamberlain House,
Park Street, Hull HU2 8TA

UNITARIAN RENEWAL GROUP

Saturday 26 October

Day gathering for all Unitarians
at Belper Unitarian Chapel,
Field Row, Belper DE56 1DH
10.30a.m. - 4.00p.m.

morning

Rev. Maria Pap (Mansfield Unitarians)
On being a Transylvanian minister in Britain

afternoon

Peter Sampson:

Sharing poems: a spiritual journey through poetry

Short walk from bus and train stations.
Car parking available.
Tea/coffee provided -
bring your own lunch - and a poem!

**Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone;
it has to be made, like bread,
remade all the time, made new.**

The Lathe of Heaven Ursula LeGuin

8 TITLED YORK LADIES

Did Lady Sarah Hewley found a Unitarian Chapel? Well, putting the 'Unitarian' bit to one side there were, in fact, 8 'York Ladies' - all contemporaries and all involved in the foundation years of our Chapel community and all worthy of mention:



1. Lady Sarah Hewley herself [see picture].

2. Lady Anne Watson, married to Lord Mayor Alderman Stephen Watson. In 1672 Ralph Ward acquired a licence to preach at her house in St. Saviourgate.

3. Lady Mary Lister (1591-c1671) mother-in-law of John Lambert Parliamentary general. To her St. Saviourgate house the congregation removed following the death of Lady Watson.

4. Lady Ursula Rokeby (1634-1707). At her house beyond Micklegate Bar, in 1684 43 people were found holding an illegal conventicle. The minister, Ralph Ward, landed in the Ousebridge gaol.

5. Lady Alice Geldart (d.1667) widow of John Geldart and twice Lord Mayor of York. Absorbed within the Chapel Charity is the charity of John Geldart.

6. Lady Priscilla Jackson Brooke, widow of Alderman James Brook Lord Mayor 1651/2 and 1661/2. The Brookes eventually moved out of town to Ellenthorpe where Lady Brooke built her own dissenting chapel.

From the *Diaries* of the puritan preacher Oliver Heywood may be added two more widows of puritan York Lord Mayors:

7. Lady Hewett said - but not confirmed - to have been the widow of another Lord Mayor.

8. Lady Hoyle (d.1688) widow of Thomas Hoyle Lord Mayor 1632-1633 and twice MP for York.

Ladies 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8 you will recognise as titled 'Ladies' according to the old York convention for the spouses of Lord Mayors:

My Lord is a Lord for a year and a day
But my Lady's a Lady for ever and aye.

Andrew Hill

UNI-NEWS

The August edition of a new-look *Uni-News* is now on line. Subscribe at it@unitarian.org.uk.

- Chief Officer, *Liz Slade* wonders about God and invites you to a telephone conversation.
- Upcoming events at Great Hucklow's Nightingale Centre including *Psychical Studies Conference 27-29 September* and the *UNI-Fest family weekend 25-28 October*.
- Our neighbouring congregation at *Mill Hill Leeds* is congregation of the month with links to a chapel video and the chapel's facebook page.
- Links to the blogs of 5 Unitarian ministers and one student minister are identified.
- Information about *Unitarian ministry training* - deadline for 2020 applications is 1 October with interviews 7-8 January in Oxford.
- 11 Unitarian congregations have been 'in the news' from *Belfast to Horsham*. *Doncaster Unitarians* held a mass same-sex blessing at Doncaster Pride; 2 congregations Cheltenham and Horsham have hosted *Extinction Rebellion* events. Also one US presidential candidate has appointed a *Unitarian Universalist chaplain*.
- Applications are needed for members of the Assembly's *ministerial stipend review committee*.
- Links to 5 items about Unitarian heritage including an item in *The Yorkshire Post* about York's Lady Hewley.



The poster features a portrait of Francis Haydn Williams on the right and a silhouette of the chapel on the left. The text is arranged in a formal, centered layout with various font sizes and weights to emphasize key information.

Whitby Flowergate Chapel
Heritage Open Day

*One man's crusade against wealth and power
in late 19th century Whitby.*

A presentation concerning the social activism
of
FRANCIS HAYDN WILLIAMS
Minister of Flowergate Unitarian Chapel
1888 - 1910
to be given by
Kate and Paddy Symons

The Moral Activist Wandercast:
Francis Haydn Williams in Whitby
A playful, occasionally interactive audio tour by
Robbie Wilson

Scan the QR code on the right and follow the instructions to download the tour

14th September 2019
2.30pm

To learn more about Francis Haydn Williams visit the web site here:
www.flowergatehaydnwilliamscentre.org.uk/

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS



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Chairperson: David Zucker
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<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:
Elizabeth Faiers (Treasurer), Simon
Hardy, Jen Atkinson, Andrew Hill (Chair),
Sue Catts and Claire Wilton.

Colton's Hospital Trustees
Elizabeth Faiers (Treasurer), Dee Boyle,
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