

Banbury Unitarians News



*A spiritual and religious fellowship, encouraging
tolerance and independent thought*

Issue 7, July - September 2013

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Letter from the Minister

Dear Friends,

Since I last wrote my Minister's Letter for the April - June newsletter, some exciting things have been happening!

For a start, we have moved house! Our new venue, the Grimsbury Community Centre, has a lot more potential for growth than the Town Hall, being in a residential area, and on the ground floor, with good access for less physically-able folk. And a lovely kitchen, with all facilities provided, plus somewhere we can store all our things between services. I know that it is not as central as the Town Hall was, but in all other respects, I think it is a great improvement. I also hope that someone from the congregation will attend the Autumn Gathering for Growth at Kingswood in September - see page 11.

Elaine Nomura and I both attended the annual meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches (see pages 3 and 4 for reports). It was good to have a Banbury presence there, so that we are participating in the broader life of the denomination. It was also at this year's GA meetings that I was formally added to the Roll of Ministers, during the Anniversary Service, which was very thrilling.

As you will see from the Calendar for this quarter (see page 3), we will not be holding a meeting of our Engagement Group in August, because so many folk are away during that month. But we will, for the first time in many years, be having a service at the end of the month. I look forward to seeing you there.

In fellowship,

Sue

Calendar for July - September 2013

July

- Thursday 11th Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life
Step 4 Empathy
- Sunday 28th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

August

- Thursday 15th No mid-month meeting due to holidays
- Sunday 25th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

September

- Thursday 12th Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life
Step 5 Mindfulness
- Sunday 29th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

All worship services are held at

Grimsbury Community Centre and start at 11.00 am

*All Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life sessions are held at
Grimsbury Community Centre and start at 10.30 am*

General Assembly Meetings by Elaine Nomura

For many years I have thought of the annual Unitarian General Assembly with increasing curiosity and a great desire to participate. This April at last I was lucky to be able to attend the residential meetings at Nottingham University. The journey to Nottingham was easy and quick and finding Nottingham University with its lovely trees and sweeping lawns was very straight forward, but finding the Business School which is on a separate nearby campus and which was where the GA was assembling proved extremely difficult. When I eventually found it I was relieved to discover that I wasn't the only person to have gone round in ever decreasing circles before reaching the goal.

Was this some kind of under-ground, surreptitious intelligence test designed by Essex Hall? I asked myself.

My struggles were rewarded by a comfortable student room with en-suite in a modern building, just yards from an impressive lofty dining hall serving really nice food of enormous quantity. A perfect recipe for a weekend away..... Oh yes, and there were meetings and entertainments too, and there were old friends and familiar faces (it was lovely to see Sue there), new friends and a bar to meet them in. There was a choir to join, music to enjoy, discussions to take part in, new ideas to absorb, new facts to learn, faces to at last put with names, books to buy, displays to pour over, banners to admire.

There was so much to do and there were so many interesting events planned that it was sometimes a painful choice deciding which talk to attend, as there were usually two or three talks or debates occurring at the same time. Some of the most interesting groups for myself were the Historical society, Visibility Strategy, Psychical Society, Assisted Dying Discussion, and of course coffee time was a great time to talk and meet.

All the participants gathered together for the Anniversary service led by Rev Sarah Tinker, and to witness the position of President passing from Elizabeth Dyson- Jones to the Rev Bill Darlison who proved to be a very entertaining speaker.

All good things come to an end and all too soon it was time to say goodbye and to return home taking plenty of food for thought, and so many happy memories.

Our Status within the General Assembly

As Elaine has reported, she enjoyed her time at the GA meetings. But one thing took a bit of the shine off: she was (to her and my

surprise) unable to vote during the General Assembly Meetings, because when the Fellowship started meeting in 1994, we were recognised as a Small Congregation, rather than as a Congregation, and hence have no voting rights. I have been in touch with Derek McAuley, Chief Officer of the General Assembly, and he has sent me a copy of the GA Constitution. The relevant section is re-printed below:

"2.1 Congregations

2.1.1 Applications shall be dealt with in accordance with the procedure laid down in Clause 5 of the General Assembly Constitution.

2.1.2 A congregation must have at least 12 subscribing members over the age of 18 years, and must have existed for regular worship for not less than one year.

2.1.3 A copy of the rules and/or constitution and by-laws must be supplied and these must be approved by the local district association and by the Executive Committee.

2.1.4 The constitution must embody a clause specifying that, in the event of the congregation ceasing to exist, its funds and property shall be transferred to an approved, specific body. This will normally be the sponsoring district association or the General Assembly, as appropriate.

2.1.5 Meetings for a religious purpose must be held at least once a month.

2.1.6 An annual subscription must be paid to the Assembly and to the district association, if required.

2.1.7 A copy of the annual report and audited/independently examined accounts as submitted to the annual meeting of members must be sent to the district association and to the Assembly.

2.1.8 The application must have the support of the district association.

2.1.9 Before the application is approved the congregation must be visited by a representative of the Executive Committee who shall make a report on the visit."

As you can see, we are fine with numbers (just!) but will need to adopt a modern constitution in order to proceed with our application. I have a copy of the model constitution recommended by the Midland Unitarian Association, which we will need to look at. It will mean having a properly-constituted Committee and audited accounts. We will also have to hold a Special General Meeting in order to adopt such a constitution, but this could be done after a regular service. We will then need to ask the Midland Unitarian Association to sponsor our application, and send the relevant documents to the General Assembly.

Grandma's Wise Words by Beryl Thomas

Just recently, I came across one of my old school books called *First Aid in English*, and in it I found a chapter I always loved - on proverbs. This set me wondering whether present day children are introduced to them in their English lessons, and if not, what are they missing?

I'm sure that, like me, you find a few of the following often come to mind:

"A stitch in time saves nine."

"Cut your coat according to your cloth."

"Penny wise, pound foolish."

"Robbing Peter to pay Paul."

All these wise old saws are as relevant as ever in these days of make do and mend and watching the pennies.

In other times, the consequences of bad behaviour were expressed vividly, as:

"You've made your bed, now you must lie in it."
"A fool and his money are soon parted."
"Grasp all, lose all."
And, controversially, "Experience teaches fools."

On the positive side,
"Every cloud has a silver lining."
"Every dog has his day."
and "Love laughs at locksmiths, but all's well that ends well."

I think our proverbs hold a richness of language and vocabulary; an insight into our often rural past and also, meaningful and concise ways of expressing some basic truths about the ups and downs of daily life. A lot for our children to miss then.

I leave you to ponder the following: "Out of sight, out of mind", although, on the other hand, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." You pays your money and you takes your choice!

Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life

During the rest of 2013 and into 2014, our Engagement Group is engaging in a very deep way with Karen Armstrong's book *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*. Already, in the first three steps, we have become closer as a community, and are learning to be more compassionate in our daily lives. Details in the Calendar on page 3.

True Compassion by Rosemary Booth

Because my husband Don suffers from myeloma, a form of cancer, he needs to attend the Cancer Clinic known as The Brodey Centre once a month for an infusion of calcium. The Brodey Centre is for the different treatments of cancer of many kinds, providing blood tests, blood transfusions, infusions and

other treatments. All this may strike dread in the hearts of patients, but once the treatments are started, the compassion of the nurses, and the companionship of fellow patients helps you to see that there is considerable care in the administration of your treatment.

When you enter the Centre, you are welcomed with a smile, and directed to a waiting area. After a short wait, a nurse takes you to the pleasant treatment area, which has electric recliner chairs, which can adjust to the most comfortable position, which is very useful, considering that the patient will usually be there for a couple of hours, at least.

The next step is the setting up of the equipment, which is carried out in a smooth and pleasant manner. Once the treatment has started, the nurse makes regular checks to see to your comfort and to ensure that all is well.

Often a patient sitting nearby will start a conversation. Nurses will come to talk to us about our families and interests, showing great understanding, and telling us about their lives. Sometimes we notice a person looking lonely, and they are encouraged to have a cup of tea, or if they are sleepy, a comforting blanket is tucked around them. A young man who is mentally handicapped was encouraged not to be afraid of a small operation he was to have. The nurse and doctor came and sat with him, to reassure him that he would feel no pain. Then the doctor, his mother, and two nurses walked with him, and his donkey with large smiling teeth that he cuddled, to the little treatment room. After about an hour, his mother came back carrying the donkey. The young man had been fine, and was awake and very pleased with himself.

This compassionate care was above the normal care we get even in a hospital. Some patients have been coming to The Brodey Centre for a couple of years, or more. They were happy to attend this warm and safe environment. Don now gets a blood test there,

and a visit from the cancer doctor or specialist. He can expect to be provided with lunch, and drinks of tea or water. We cannot speak highly enough about the Brodey Centre, with the truly compassionate nurses.

Coronation Singalong at the Royal Albert Hall by Doris Worrall

On the afternoon of 2nd June, the 60th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation, I was among the many folk attending the *Queen's Coronation Singalong* at the Royal Albert Hall.

The event was hosted by Jonathan Cohen, and the two principal singers were Alison Jiear and Tim Howar. They were joined and supported by the London Concert Chorus and the London Concert Orchestra.

Our programmes included the words to all the music featured (hence 'Singalong'). We started with the National Anthem, and then the first half included a Cockney medley, *The White Cliffs of Dover*, and medleys from the musicals *Oliver!* and *Grease*. After the interval, we enjoyed singing along to *The Sound of Music Medley*, and then to a variety of popular songs, by artists such as Petula Clark, Tom Jones, the Beatles, Elton John, Tina Turner, Queen and Abba. The concert was rounded off by rousing versions of *There'll Always Be An England, Rule, Britannia!* and *Land of Hope and Glory*.

It was another memorable concert at the Royal Albert Hall.

As the Spirit Moves Me by Sue Woolley

I love the words of Quaker Stephen Allott: "It was this Spirit of God which breathed into our human clay to make us living

souls." This is something I have come to believe in the past eighteen months or so, through reading the works of the great Celtic poet and theologian John O'Donohue. He wrote, and I have come to believe (because it makes sense to me) that our souls come from elsewhere, and inhabit our human bodies, our "clay", and go elsewhere after death. Our souls are animated by the Spirit - it is the Spirit that enables us to respond to the Divine in the world.

One of the most obvious ways in which the Spirit works within us (at least to me) is when we respond to something beautiful. Who has not felt their heart lift and their level of joy soar when contemplating a majestic mountain, or the endlessly changing sea, or the intricacies of a flower, or a man-made work of art, or the face of someone you love? Who has not thrilled to the sound of uplifting music or the songs of birds in the springtime, or the sound of a beloved voice? I believe that this is the Spirit within us recognising and responding to the beauty of the world all around us.

How can we learn to listen to the Spirit, and to recognise her at work in the world and in our hearts? I think that this may be attempted by what I would call 'sacred living' - recognising that God / the Spirit / the Divine Other is present everywhere, all the time. Sacred living is about weaving moments of attention into your everyday life, and recognising the sacred there. It is about living with a new level of awareness. It is about going through our days paying attention to what is happening in each passing moment. It is about noticing the presence of the divine, the numinous, everywhere, in the natural world, in other people, in ourselves and in things that happen to us. Sacred living is about rediscovering our sense of wonder, and living our lives in response to that.



Regional Events

GA Presidential Visit to Warwick Unitarian Church

Warwick Unitarians have invited all Midlands Unitarians to join them on **Sunday 14th July**, when **Rev. Bill Darlison**, President of the General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches, is leading worship there, at **4.30 pm**.

If you haven't booked a Presidential visit to your congregation, it would be worth going along.

Unitarian New Meeting Birmingham 40th Anniversary of Ryland Street

Unitarians in Birmingham moved into their new Church in Ryland Street, Five Ways, Birmingham in 1973, and will be celebrating their 40th anniversary on **Sunday 29th September**, at **3.00 pm**. All Midlands Unitarians are warmly invited to join them.

Midland Unitarian Association of Lay Preachers & Service Leaders

Autumn Training Day: Gathering for Growth

Course Leader: Rev. Ant Howe, minister of Kingswood & Warwick

When: Saturday 21st September 2013

Where: Kingswood Meeting House, Hollywood,
Worcs B47 5DQ

Times: 10.00 am - 4.15 pm (coffee/tea from 9.30 am)

Cost: FREE to MUA congregations; £10 for others.

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Summer Reflection by Brian Nelson

Spend a day on the seashore, and you can watch the tides all day as they make tiny, meaningless changes in the sand.

Come back a season later, and the changes won't seem so meaningless. A sandbar may have appeared – or a whole section of beach may have been swept away.

If, in the words of Gandhi, we must be the change we seek to create, then often we must work in small strokes. The big picture may not even come in clearly until we've been at it for a while. But tide after tide, nature is our ally in reminding us that there's nothing that can't be accomplished if we can find that strange combination of softness and inexorability that we admire in the ocean.