

Banbury Unitarians News



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

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Letter from the Minister

Dear Friends,

It hardly seems possible that another year has passed. I'm writing this in mid-December, the week before our Christmas Service, and looking forward to some of Doris Worrall's delicious mince pies! The year has been marked by several joyous occasions:

This time last year, we were just coming to the end of my first year as your minister. This March saw the joyous occasion of my Induction Service, in which you all participated. It is one of my happiest memories of the whole year.

In April, Elaine Nomura joined me at the General Assembly meetings in Nottingham, when I was formally added to the Roll of Ministers - another joyous occasion.

This time last year, we were still huddled in the Committee Room of the Town Hall, never dreaming that we would soon be moving to our fine new meeting place in Grimsbury Community Centre, which happened in May. I know that it is less convenient in terms of location for some of you, but the facilities - the parking, the storage, the space - are so much better here, that I think it has been a positive move, on the whole.

This year has also seen the celebration of two milestones for the Thomas family: Jack's 90th birthday in April, and Beryl and Jack's Diamond Wedding in August, both joyous occasions which were also celebrated by the Fellowship.

And in October, our Anniversary Service was led by Rev. Ant Howe, minister of Kingswood and Warwick. As usual, Ant's wise words were very well received. Another joyous occasion. May we have many more in 2014!

In fellowship, *Sue*

Calendar for January - March 2014

January

- Thursday 9th Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life
Step 9 Concern for Everybody
- Sunday 26th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley*

February

- Thursday 13th Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life
Step 10 Knowledge
- Sunday 23rd Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

March

- Thursday 13th Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life
Step 11 Recognition
- Sunday 30th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

***NB To be followed by our "Not The Christmas Lunch" - see below for details.**

*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*

"Not The Christmas Lunch"

In the lead-up to Christmas, it proved impossible to find a date and venue that suited all the congregation. So we decided to brighten up January, by having our festive meal then. You are all warmly invited to join us at the Bowling Green Steakhouse Hotel, Overthorpe Road, Banbury OX17 2XA, for our Not The Christmas Lunch. It will be taking place after our regular Sunday service, on Sunday 26th January, at about 12.45 pm. Please let Elaine Nomura know if you are planning to attend.

Next Steps for the Fellowship

After my visit to the GA where I discovered that we at Banbury are classed as a "small congregation", we have decided to try to gain full status by removing ourselves from this category. The only clue to our being classed as a small congregation is a very small "sc" before our entry in the Directory hand-book! It means that we don't have full status and cannot vote at the GA meetings. This is strange as there are several other congregations who are a similar size to ourselves who have full status. To gain full status we have to have a named committee and a modern constitution. To this end we held a short meeting on Thursday 14th November.

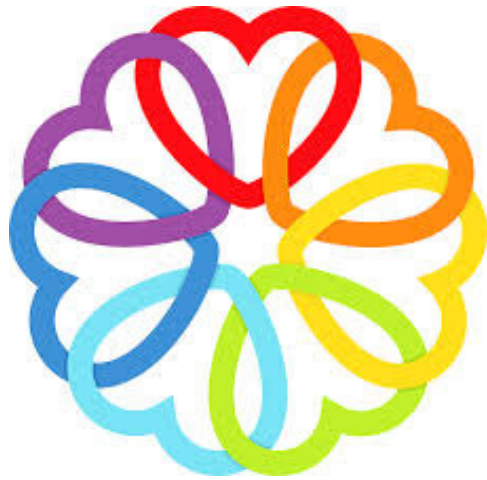
At this meeting, we did manage to establish our committee with David Heppingstall kindly agreeing to be Chairman, Malcolm Sadler Secretary and myself Treasurer. We also discussed the outline of the constitution from an example model that I had found on the Unitarian site on the internet.

Since our meeting Sue and Sandy Ellis have kindly provided me with a clearer model for us to use, as approved by the District and by the Charity Commission, so I hope that in the new year we can put our constitution together and move forward.

Elaine Nomura

Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life

During the first half of 2014, our Engagement Group will continue to engage in a very deep way with Karen Armstrong's book *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*. Details in the Calendar on page 3.



Angels by Helen Gilkes

Recently, Sue gave us an interesting address on the subject of angels, and I would like to add my personal experience. In August '94, my elder daughter Jenny (Jennifer), sadly took her life, at the age of twenty-nine. When she was twenty-five, I had persuaded her to have a photographic portrait taken.

In July '95 I attended a weekend course at the Grange, a retreat house near Shrewsbury. I was advised to take something precious, which I could talk about, and I took the photographic portrait. The Grange is a large house, and I slept on the second floor. Maria, a fellow participant, was also on the second floor.

At the end of the weekend, I was the last to leave. Maria had slid a coloured postcard under my bedroom door. I was a reproduction of the Italian Renaissance painting *The Annunciation*, and showed only the Angel Gabriel. Maria had written a message on the back of the postcard: "An angel for you, Helen, for you and your beautiful daughter." I was so touched that I framed the picture and I still have it.

Conflict by Pam Parrish

Our earthly world continues turning, regardless of
Man's pursuance of conflict with his fellow-man.
Seasons, wondrous in their beauty and diversity,
Come and go.

The first green spears of snowdrop leaves thrust
Thru' frozen soil, sharp and spiky
As any sword.

Daffodil trumpets rise in golden triumph,
Needing no call to arms
To herald their coming.

Trees, their branches in green glory,
No camouflage to hide
Their wondrous growth.

Nature, a formidable adversary, makes war of its own,
Has Divine capacity for fire, flood, torrent and quake,
A terrible army at its behest.

Summer brings forth poppies, their beauty
And colour making memories of war
Covering the fields with blood-like hue.

The golden shade of Autumn ends the dying days,
Suggests analogy of fallen youth and sacrifice
The leaves fall as tears.

With the frost and snow comes respite from
Conflict, a chance for reflection
Would that Man take time to halt its
Headlong hurtle to extinction
And emulate the slumbering season.

Two Robin Poems, contributed by Beryl Thomas

I am the proper
Bird for this season -
Not blessed St Turkey,
Born to be eaten.

I'm man's inedible
Permanent bird.
I dine in his garden,
My spoon is his spade.

I'm the true token
Of Christ the Child-King:
I nest in man's stable,
I eat at man's table,
Through all his dark winters
I sing.
U.A. Fanthorpe



image:tallaght4kids.ie

I heard a robin sing today
Although the sky was grey.
I wonder what he sang about,
He had so much to say.

I'll give a smile to try to
Cheer another's dreary day,
Remembering how the robin sang
Although the sky was grey.

And if there's troubled times ahead
To face me on my way,
I'll remember how the robin sang
Although the sky was grey.

Rosalie Cantello

The Gift of Wonder: a blogpost by Sue Woolley

At this time of the year, I can end up feeling distinctly un-Christmassy. Positively bah-humbuggerish, in fact. As I have written elsewhere: "By the time December comes, we will be blatting around like the proverbial blue-bottomed flies, buying presents, sending cards, ordering turkeys and making the hearts of the supermarket shareholders glad by spending our hard-earned cash on excessive amounts of food and drink to see us through the festive season. Then, when Christmas Day has come and gone, many of us will end us with post-Christmas indigestion - too much food, too much drink, too much *everything*."

When I am doing the weekly food shop, the commercial over-kill of Christmas is only too apparent. The supermarket shelves are groaning with "seasonal" goodies, most of which have either too much sugar or too much fat in them. Not to mention the booze, which of course I have forsworn this year, and which is on offer on every aisle-end.



image: archive.aweber.com

So it was a particularly welcome gift this morning, to spot a toddler in a pushchair, gazing up at the Christmas decorations that festooned the supermarket ceiling, with a rapt expression of wonder on his face. I pointed this out to his Mum, and it made her day too. Of course, to him, it *is* all new and wonderful and wonder-full. I was so grateful for the reminder of what Christmas really is about - not the food and the drink and the presents, but the joy and the sharing and the sense of wonder at the birth of a child. And I share a reflection which I wrote some years ago for times such as these:

Let us take a moment to appreciate all the good things in our lives; our comfortable homes, our many possessions, which make our lives easy and secure.

But more importantly, the blessings that money cannot buy:

The love of our families;

The companionship of our friends;

This beloved community of freedom and trust;

The beauties of nature;

Our bodies – those complex systems that work in such mysterious ways;

Our health;

The very air that we breathe.

[silence]

Help us to realise how rich we are already, and help us to ask the question “do I need this?” rather than “do I want this?” in relation to everything.

Help us to realise that “true happiness lies in wanting what you have.”

Amen

Regional Events

Midland Unitarian Association Annual General Meeting

Guest Speaker: John Naish, author of *Enough*

When: Saturday 29th March 2014

Where: Shrewsbury Unitarian Church, High Street, Shrewsbury
SY1 1LR

Times: 10.30 for 11.00 am - c. 4.00 pm

Cost: a nominal sum will be charged for lunch.



Midland Unitarian Association of Lay Preachers and Service Leaders Spring Training Day

Using Social Media: Facebook, Twitter & Blogging

**Course Leaders: Yvonne Aburrow, Alison Patrick
& Sue Woolley**

When: Saturday 8th February 2014

Where: Unitarian New Meeting Church, Ryland Street,
Birmingham B16 8BL

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

Cost: FREE to MUA participants; £10 to others

YOU WILL NEED TO BRING YOUR OWN LAPTOP.

A taste of what can be done with Twitter: some Tweet Prayers (140 characters) written during the Spring 2013 Training Day

Spirit of discovery, let us come with open minds and hearts. To listen, to share, to learn from one another. This we can do today. **(Alison Patrick)**

Let us rejoice in the warmth of our fellowship symbolised by the flame of our chalice, hold it in our hearts, share it with all we meet. **(Dorothy Haughton)**

Grant that as winter dies away and new life is reborn we may rise to a greater awareness of the gifts of nature round about us and a greater awareness of the rebirth, continuity and unity of life. Amen. **(Gavin Lloyd)**

The mornings are lengthening, The light is growing stronger. Rise up and meet the new day Raise your voice in thanksgiving We are alive! **(Kathy Beckett)**

May the Forces of Good guide us on the Path of Love and protect us from the Temptations of Evil Amen **(Lesley Harris)**

Spirit of life and love, May we live our lives in a spirit of compassion, That we might leave the world A better place than we found it. Amen **(Sue Woolley)**

God, maker of the fertile earth, the trees and flowers, the sun and rain, thank you for all these things. Help us treat them, and each other, well. Amen. **(Tas Cooper)**

What wondrous heavens today. Blue skies against white clouds, rolling across, transfigured in shapes so imaginative, exporting souls to their new destination. May I one day be part of the cosmos in such a way. **(Winnie Gordon)**

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What the Donkey Saw by U.A. Fanthorpe

No room in the inn, of course,
And not that much in the stable,
What with the shepherds, Magi, Mary,
Joseph, the heavenly host -
Not to mention the baby
Using our manger as a cot.
You couldn't have squeezed another cherub in
For love nor money.

Still, in spite of the overcrowding,
I did my best to make them feel wanted.
I could see the baby and I
Would be going places together.