

Banbury Unitarians News



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

Issue 13, January - March 2015 Contents

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Letter from the Minister

Dear Friends,

"Ring out the old, ring in the new" says our hymn (see page 8 for the rest). 2014 has been quite a year for Banbury Unitarians, one way or another.

In the first half of the year, we continued our study of Karen Armstrong's book *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, which Jack Thomas reviewed in the July-September issue of the newsletter.

Jack and Beryl have had a very mixed year, healthwise, as one or the other of them has been in hospital on several occasions. I have visited them regularly, and I know that the rest of the congregation have kept in touch too. We are hoping that they will be able to rejoin us at church in 2015.

Pam Parrish has also been ill, but is now back home in Spencer Court and "on the mend", although she has been warned to make haste slowly. I am pleased to include an account of a retreat she made in the late 1990s (see page 4). In other changes, Don and Rosemary Booth have moved into a very nice ground-floor apartment, also in Spencer Court, and have settled in very happily there.

The congregation adopted a modern constitution at its AGM in April, and appointed a regular committee. Hopefully 2015 will see the long-awaited application to become a Full Congregation of the General Assembly.

We have also adopted a new hymn book, *Hymns for Living*, known as the Green Book, which has enabled our worship to be supported by more appropriate hymns.

Wishing you all a Joyful and Peaceful 2015,

Sue

Calendar for January - March 2015

January

- Thursday 8th Discussion Group, led by Sue Woolley:
Freedom of Belief - how far should it go?
- Sunday 25th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

February

- Thursday 12th Discussion Group, led by Sue Woolley:
Do Animals Have Souls?
- Sunday 22nd Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

March

- Thursday 12th Discussion Group, led by Elaine Nomura:
What Is This Miracle We Call Life?
- Sunday 29th Worship service, led by Malcolm Sadler

*All worship services are held at
Grimsbury Community Centre and start at 11.00 am
Discussion Group sessions are held at
Grimsbury Community Centre and start at 10.30 am*

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## Post-Christmas Lunch

We are delighted to announce that a table has been booked at the **Bowling Green Steakhouse**, just outside Banbury. Our post-Christmas lunch will be on **Sunday 25th January**, after our normal Worship Service. All are most welcome, including partners. Please let Elaine Nomura (01926 611 964) know if you are planning to come along, as she will need to let the Restaurant know final numbers. It would be so lovely if everybody could come. Sue Woolley is quite happy to offer lifts.

## Retreat in 1997 by Pamela Parrish

It had been a long time since I had had a break. My husband had been very ill, and life had been hard work at times during the last year.

A friend suggested a weekend retreat - four days in all. At first it sounded wonderful - then all the usual negativity crept in. What about things at home? Would my husband accept help?

After a lot of determined effort and practical application e.g.. a good supply of frozen dinners, everything was arranged. The Retreat House would even accept a non-Catholic partial agnostic like me at this Carmelite House - no questions asked! "We are rather quiet this weekend" the pleasant Host Brother remarked. I was surprised how ordinary he looked, this Brother with a capital B. "Choose any room you wish," he gestured expansively. Having dealt with mundane issues like mealtimes and vital needs, he scuttled back to his Priory.

My friend Lyn and I spent an hilarious half-hour choosing a room in the empty House. It was so difficult as they were all exactly and beautifully alike, barring the odd icon! The same pretty matching everything.

In the end I chose a room with a view of Oxford and distant spires when I stood up, and trees over my head when recumbent. It seemed so irreverent, all this rushing from room to room trying to choose, but no-one was around.

I was finally alone, and had a childlike feeling of abandonment as Lyn's car disappeared down the long leafy drive.

"Come on, now" I urged myself. "You wanted a break - use it!" However, the feeling of loneliness persisted all through that first day. I tried to read and meditate, but concentration was difficult - I could not get home out of my head.

## **The Gift of Life - a blogpost by Sue Woolley**

My meals appeared on the dining room table as if by magic. That was a relief. Somehow all that solitude made me feel so hungry. Oh! for a fridge to raid to assuage this hollow emptiness centred somewhere around my solar plexus. All I had thought to bring was a packet of digestives, and the nearest shop was four miles away. "Did these Brothers binge on biscuits, or crave chocolate?" I wondered idly. "Was this allowed in their elevated existence?"

I attended the early morning service. The Brotherhood wore dark brown habits, and now looked the real thing. Prayers would last an hour, but I could leave at any time, I was told. It was so cold and eerily quiet as the Brothers knelt interminably. How did they do it? Years of practice, I guessed, as I rubbed my numb knees.

I left, feeling light-headed, after fifteen minutes. The birds sang joyously in the May sunshine. Spring had arrived, and I had been too busy at home to notice.

Time, which initially seemed endless, now seemed to race away. I painted for the first time in months. It felt as if a window had opened, admitting the beauty of the world back into my consciousness, and with it, a feeling of elation.

The Brothers left me strictly alone, and I welcomed their remoteness. I knew that should I need them, they would be there for me. I attended prayers each morning, and was struck by the universality of the Creator. My beliefs were never questioned, and I felt accepted.

I have never looked back since that time. Of course there have been many ups and downs, and a lot of my creative energy has been absorbed by the mundane. However, it was reassuring to know that I only had to 'tune in' again, and there it was waiting for me. I needed to stand back to find out.

Yesterday I did something very simple, which I should have done years ago. It didn't cost anything, it hardly hurt at all, and it didn't take very long. But it could make a huge difference to somebody else. I gave blood. I used to be a regular donor, back in the 1980s, but kept passing out after donating (I weighed considerably less in those days) so in the end they told me to stop going. Life went on, and I forgot all about it. Until a friend posted on Facebook that she had given blood, which gave me the nudge needed to go online and investigate.

I have to say, I was incredibly impressed by the professionalism of it all. I had to fill out a long form, and was then questioned about my answers. For example, we had been on holiday to Turkey in March, and they wanted to know which part I had visited, and which airport I had flown out of. I've also just been referred for possible minor surgery on my knee, so there were questions about that. I had to drink a pint of water before donating, and also have a finger-prick blood test, to see whether my iron levels were sufficiently high. Only when the staff were satisfied that I was fit to donate, was I led to a special reclining chair. The actual process took about eight or nine minutes, and I was given a bandage to roll around my hand to stimulate blood flow, and also told to clench and unclench my buttocks constantly (apparently this helps keep the blood pressure low). Between the bandage rolling and the buttock clenching, time passed fairly quickly. It was like trying to rub your stomach and pat your head at the same time. Hilarious!

Then I was returned to the upright position very slowly and waved over to another part of the hall, where I was given a cold drink and a snack. When they were sure I was OK, and was feeling fine, I was allowed to leave. An hour well spent.

## District Events

### Midland Unitarian Association Annual General Meeting

**When:** Saturday 21st March 2015

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

**Guest Speaker:** Mrs. Alison Thursfield, member of MUA and National Executive Committees

**Time:** 10.30 am for 11.00 am - 4.00 pm

**Bring your own lunch - refreshments provided by UNM**

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Midland Unitarian Association of Lay Preachers and Service Leaders: Spring Training Day Workshop: The Road Ahead

Workshop Leader: Rev. Rob Gregson, Simple Gifts

When: Saturday 25th April 2015

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

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

Cost: FREE to MUA participants; £10 to others.

Contact Sue Woolley for further details of both events

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Chairman: David Heppingstall
079-3155-9531 e-mail: heppingstall@googlemail.com

Treasurer: Elaine Nomura
077-6967-8363 e-mail: emtnomura@aol.com

Secretary & Musical Director: Malcolm Sadler
01789-205571

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### Ring Out, Ring In (Hymn no. 257)

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,  
The flying cloud, the frosty light:  
The year is dying in the night;  
Ring out, wild bells, and let it die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:  
The year is going, let it go;  
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,  
And ancient forms of party strife;  
Ring in the nobler modes of life,  
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,  
The civic slander and the spite;  
Ring in the love of truth and right,  
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease;  
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;  
Ring out the thousand wars of old,  
Ring in the thousands years of peace.

**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**