

Banbury Unitarians News



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

Issue 14, April - June 2015 Contents

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Letter from the Minister

Dear Friends,

The end of the quarter is looming, so I guess it must be time for our latest newsletter. I am also in the throes of preparing to attend the Annual Meetings of our General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

The worst of the Winter is over (we hope) and we can all look forward to some warmer, sunnier weather. There is a lot going on at Banbury Unitarians this quarter, and I hope that you will all wish to attend our Annual General Meeting after our Worship Service on 26th April, and also come along to the three meetings of the Discussion Group, on the second Thursdays of the month.

We've got a couple of interesting topics this quarter: *Freedom, Reason and Tolerance - which Unitarian values would you choose?* in April, and, in the lead up to the General Election in May, we're looking at the question *Should Unitarians be political?* I'm afraid I will be away on holiday in Wales for the June meeting, so you will have to work out a topic amongst yourselves.

Some of you may have seen in the National Executive Committee's Key Messages in *The Inquirer* that I have finally been granted Full status as a Minister on the Roll of the General Assembly. It has been a long journey, but a very worthwhile one.

I have been sad this quarter to receive no contributions for the newsletter from you, the congregation. This is your newsletter, and it would be lovely to see stories, poems, reports, book reviews, even letters. So why not get your pens out, and write to me?

Wishing you a blessed and peaceful Easter, *Sue*

Calendar for April - June 2015

April

- Thursday 9th Discussion Group, led by Sue Woolley:
Freedom, Reason & Tolerance - what Unitarian values would you choose?
- Sunday 26th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley
to be followed by our Annual General Meeting (see below)

May

- Thursday 14th Discussion Group, led by Sue Woolley:
Should Unitarians be political?
- Sunday 31st Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

June

- Thursday 11th Discussion Group, led by members:
Topic to be announced
- Sunday 28th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

*All worship services are held at
Grimsbury Community Centre and start at 11.00 am*

*Discussion Group sessions are held in the small room at
Grimsbury Community Centre and start at 10.30 am*

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## Annual General Meeting

Our Annual General Meeting will be held after our service on Sunday April 26th. It is your chance to hold the Officers and Committee to account, and to find out what they have achieved on your behalf, during the last twelve months. Please come along and let your voice be heard.

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The Three Sides of Lent - a blogpost by Sue Woolley

This year there has been quite a flurry of interest among Unitarian friends about Lent, and what they are planning to "do" for it. Which made me look at this Christian season more closely. On the one hand, there is the self-denying, penitential aspect, which, (interestingly) many secular folk have also latched on to. Even my avowedly-atheist son knows that you are supposed to give up something for Lent.



And on the other hand, there is the life-affirming, positive aspect of using the period of Lent to intentionally establish a new spiritual practice, which I rather like. And in between these, there is the idea of giving up something as a positive practice, rather than as penitential one. I'd like to look at these in turn, and see how they might work out in a Unitarian context.

First of all, giving something up as a penitential, self-denying practice. I had toyed with the idea of giving up chocolate for Lent, really as a way of losing weight, when I read a post from Unvirtuous Abbey "For those who think that the season of Lent is The Biggest Loser - Jesus Edition, we pray." And winced. I

cannot enter into the proper Christian self-denying headspace, so I think it would be disrespectful of me to give up something for Lent just because.

And anyhow, I don't really want to.

However, there is another aspect to giving something up, which may be more appealing to Unitarians, because it could be done for what we might consider to be "the right motives." That is, to decide to give something up for Lent for a positive reason. For example, if you have played with the idea of giving up meat and becoming vegetarian, you might swear off meat for the period of Lent as a dry-run at making a beneficial change to your lifestyle. But this will only work if you had thought about it before, rather than doing it just for the sake of it.

But the approach to Lent that really speaks to my condition is the third way - that of adopting a positive spiritual practice. They say that it takes twenty repetitions of a particular action / renunciation to form a new habit, so the forty days of Lent should be ample time to form a fairly solid new spiritual practice. Last year, a friend started a new Facebook page, *Photography as a Spiritual Practice*, which he and other folk who joined him have maintained ever since, with a different theme each week.

In my case, I decided to really get to grips with centering prayer, a spiritual practice which I have started innumerable times, but not managed to stick to for more than about a week, before the excuses started. "I'm too busy." "I haven't got time this morning." "I'm not in the mood." "I need to get out of the house early."

In a way, it is the simplest spiritual practice of all, as it consists of sitting in silence, waiting on God. Just that. Just sitting. Just. Sitting.

But let me tell you, it is the hardest thing in the world. At least for me, because I find it so hard to still my mind. To let go. To just be. Yet so many people whose opinions I respect have talked about the benefits to be derived from this practice, that I have been giving it one more try, during this Lenten season. I started on Ash Wednesday, and have managed to sit for just over 20 minutes each morning so far. And I am beginning to see that in time, it will help to provide a space of peace in my day, and will be beneficial.

It is similar to the Buddhist practice of meditation, but the emphasis is on waiting on God in the silence "Be still, and know that I am God." And luckily for my stiff knees and sore shoulder, I'm not expected to sit in the lotus position. But Just Sitting Still, and trying to be open to God, is a challenge all by itself. Or so I am finding.



I hope that if you decided to give something up, or start something new for Lent this year, it has been beneficial to your spirit.

**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.

****It would be so good if somebody from Banbury could attend
this course****

Rites of Passage Foundation Step Course

We are offering a four-part course, leading to a GA-recognised qualification – the Rites of Passage Foundation Step.

Session 1: Weddings: 9th May

led by Rev. Martin Whitell, District Minister, LDPA

Session 2: Christenings / Baptisms / Namings: 18th July

led by Rev. Lynne Readett

Session 3: Funerals: 26th September

led by Rev. Ant Howe, Minister at Kingswood

Session 4: Putting it all into practice: 14th November

led by Rev. Sue Woolley, District Minister, MUA

Where: Kingswood Meeting House, Worcs. B47 5DQ

Dates: Saturdays 9th May, 18th July, 26th September &
14th November 2015

Times: 10.00 a.m. to 4.15 p.m. (coffee/tea from 9.30 a.m.)

Total Cost: £55.00 (£15.00 in advance; £10.00 for each session)

Contact Sue Woolley for further details of both events

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Treasurer: Elaine Nomura

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

Secretary & Musical Director: Malcolm Sadler

01789-205571

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*Spring* by John Knopf

Spring is a time of movement and unrest. It is, a poet has written, "the cruellest time". It was the time of the crucifixion. Keep our hearts steady through its storms, our faces firm against the rain and hail.

It is a time for pruning and for repair, for discarding what is broken and useless, for repairing what is worn, but useful. May we have the judgement to know which is which, and the strength to do what is needed with both.

Spring is a time of light and glory, of the snowdrop, the crocus and the daffodil. Open our eyes to see its gifts. May the green gold of spring shine in our hearts, our spirits be filled with its coinage of beauty.

Spring is a time of cleansing airs. Let us open our windows to the breath of heaven, our hearts to the winds of change. Fill our lungs with new life, our sails with the breath of power, that we may live and sail to the glory of God.