

NUF

Newsletter!



- Foy Society
- 'The Unitarian Life' Book Review
- President's Ponderings
...and more

*"In the flow of religious thought and practice,
Unitarians represent openness and inquiry in the spiritual quest"*

Registered Charity Number: 1040294

I sit here with a blank piece of paper, a daunting task for someone not used to writing. Nevertheless, I signed up to this job, so here goes. It's a few days before Christmas, when I'm writing this, and my wife is still busy distributing cards to our neighbours, most of whom I don't know, we've only lived here 12 years now so we are relative newcomers!

I for my part have finished every thing I have to do for Christmas and as two of our sons have offered to cook our Christmas and Boxing day lunches I no longer have that task to look forward to. So here I am sitting here wondering what to say to you all, apart from Happy New Year.

Firstly let me talk about a formal task that will involve all of you in the New Year. The NUF Committee should comprise of eight members who, along with our four officers, act as Trustees to the NUF. Currently we only have five permanent members and two co-opted members who joined the committee in the latter part of last year. At the AGM in April I would like to announce a full complement of Committee members and to this end I need your help. Enclosed with this copy of the Newsletter will be a nomination form so that you can propose members you know who might be willing to join the Committee. If you know of anyone who is qualified to stand then please get in touch with them and ask if they are willing. If they are, then fill in the form and send it to the Returning Officer, the address of which is at the top of the form. If you have difficulty finding a seconder or you don't know another member to act in this capacity please let me know at nuf@nufonline.org.uk and I will see if I can help.

The only criteria you will need to consider is that the person you nominate must be computer literate as all committee correspondence and discussion now take place online.

In the event that there are more than three candidates proposed there will be an election, the result of which will be announced at the April AGM in Birmingham.

Now let me talk of a subject that I am particularly involved with and have been for many years now. That is the NUF website www.nufonline.org.uk This website contains a whole host of information including archives of past NUF publications along with other publication written by prominent members of the Unitarian movement. In addition there are monthly video 'Reflections' and Unitarian Sunday Services that UKUnitarianTV have recorded for your enjoyment. In the current 'service' we visit Altrincham in Cheshire for their 'Animal Service' conducted by the now very slim Rev Danny Crosby, Slimming World's man of the year'. As one of those involved in the recording of this service I can tell you it was an interesting experience and one where the congregation didn't always act as expected, or maybe they did! The video lasts for about 45 minutes and there are subtitles for the hymns if you want to join in at home.

Next there is the Forum, the 'Unitarian Internet Fellowship' linked again from the website, where you can read and contribute to topics of the day not always confined to Unitarian matters. Or why not click on the Facebook link at the top of the page and add your comments and thoughts there.

Let me now come on to financial matters.

For some time now the NUF has seen a decline in it's membership. When I first got involved the NUF had over 300 members now that figure has dropped to little over 100. Production costs have risen over this period and postal costs have also gone up sharply. Sadly we will not exist if we don't do something to reduce our costs. To this end I will by making a proposal at the AGM that we should reduce the number of publications and possibly limit each to a fewer number of pages. If you feel strongly please feel free to contact me. preferably by email but also by ordinary mail if you don't have access to the electronic method. Alternatively you can always air your views at the AGM in Birmingham or through the pages of the Newsletter.

Finally may I thank the Committee and in particular Ken Smith for all their hard work over the year and wish you all a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Minister's Page

I have been a bit caught up in the doom and gloom of the coming year. For good reason I think. On the one hand there is Brexit. In my days of shopping in the Arab markets, I was given good advice. 'You want to buy and he wants to sell! So you should be able to reach an agreement'. So it could be a tricky Brexit if we have nothing to bargain with. Then there is Donald Trump and all the uncertainty he has brought to the world.

I felt proud of our Unitarian cousins in the United States. They have adamantly declared that they stand on the side of love. The values they have always preached, about the worth and dignity of every human being, they have said they will proclaim louder. They will speak out against those who boast 'They speak for all the people', because they do not.

It has made me resolve not to take sides but in my small way attempt to heal the divisions and mend the cracks that are appearing in our society. This year it means something to be a Unitarian. That is my resolution - to stand up for what I believe in.

And the world still rolls on for all the worry about politics and economics. In January we will still look at our collection of seed packets and scan the catalogue for new stock. We will plan the year ahead for the allotment and the garden. We will look through the holiday brochures and dream, and maybe book. My preaching plan for the year is now full and the golf club have proposed me as vice captain for the coming season. I am booked to record a series of 'Thoughts for the Day' on our local radio station, Bolton Fm. (I am pleased to be one of three Unitarian ministers on the station's rota). The Bolton Unitarian Earth Spirit Group is quite well established and I am working to establish a strong national presence for the network. I have the squad of veterans from my old regiment that I am responsible for. I am on the board of All Souls Bolton, a project to inspire and regenerate community cohesion. There is much to look forward to.

I have a wish too to see the NUF grow and prosper. The last series of our ViewPoint, 'What my faith means to me' was quite inspiring. I hope you feel brave enough to offer your own versions for future publications!

I have to admit our equivalent organisation in the United States, 'The Church of the Larger Fellowship' inspires me. I know they have financial resources but they get the resources because they do things. Couldn't we be a stronger voice, individually and collectively?

Yes, There is much to ponder on as the new year greets us. I wish you all a peaceful and a happy year to come. There are jobs that still must be done but there are challenges too. Let us face up to them.

Worship Page

We are leaving the midwinter behind. The days are lengthening and it is time to look forward to the spring. On the winter solstice a small group of us gathered in a Unitarian chapel just as daylight was fading from the shortest day. Our only light was a single candle and it represented the year gone by. Amongst the gathering shadows we were asked to sit peacefully and in our minds review the year that was ending. What were our highs and what were our lows? What had we learned from our experiences of the year?

Outside, the darkness was complete. The candle was extinguished and the year had ended. Then a new candle was lit and we each lit our own candle from it. A new year had begun. This was the light we would carry with us. And yes, if there was still sadness lingering from an event of the previous year, now it had a new light shining on it. A new determination to deal with life.

It was a simple ceremony and it was intensely spiritual.

I was pleased to have taken that time to be out of time at a special time.

In the twilight of the year to lay the burdens down and review them, recall the happy times, and then move forward again. Outside again the darkness felt special, the stars seemed brighter, our footsteps were lighter and our hearts were joyful. The new year seemed to have begun with a blessing. I pass that same blessing on to you.

Prayer

May the person that I really am step forward into the light. Step through the curtains of self doubt and insecurity onto the stage and walk to the footlights.

May I speak honestly about my strengths and weaknesses.

May I love my friends more and invite new friends.

May I listen more than I talk.

May I resolve to do something actively to help in my local community.

May I bring at least one new friend into the Unitarian Movement with me. If I cannot run, may I walk, if I cannot walk may I write and speak.

May I take time each day for reflection and worship. At the end of each day may I review what I have done and who I am.

May my light shine in blessing and feel blessed. May the person I want to be become the person I am.



President's Ponderings

January is a time for reflection on the year we have just left and the new year that is just beginning.

Very many changes have taken place in the world, changes that have set a new way of thinking about the world we live in. There seems to be no room for complacency that life in the UK will continue chugging along very nicely as clearly many in countries around the world, along with ours, have spoken for the need to change. The big question for each of us is how to uphold our liberal values in a world where these values seem not to have served everyone as well as we would like.

This isn't the place to be political but as we move into the new year the need to recognise that we need to find a new way of expressing and living out our values and principles seems to be clear. As T S Eliot wrote in *Little Gidding* from his *Four Quartets*:

*For last year's words belong to last year's language
And next year's words, await another voice...*

January is the month for both self, community and national examination. On all levels, we must continue striving, as many school reports say: 'S/he must try to do better'. That doesn't mean giving up on difficult situations but trying to find ways of moving forward, learning from what may not work in the situations we find ourselves in today.

Our own Fellowship is going through a period of 'self-examination' too, as it is clear that change will need to happen for reasons that have been mentioned in *Newsletters* throughout the year. However, T S Eliot also writes in *Little Gidding*:

*What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.*

Members can be assured that throughout 2017 every effort will be made to find ways of expressing and sharing the values and aims of this Fellowship, which has a unique place in the Unitarian community.

Joan Wilkinson.

Book Review

The Unitarian Life – Voices from the Past and Present **Edited by Stephen Lingwood** **Published by The Lindsey Press 2008**

I come to this book late and how sorry I am to think that such a valuable book has been missing from my bookshelves for the past eight years. However, this is a book that will remain timeless at whatever stage readers may get around to purchasing a copy for themselves.

Stephen writes in the Introduction that he would like the book to function as a “work in progress-living-scripture” as we engage with the ‘breadth and depth of our global religious community’. This breadth and depth helps us to understand ‘contemporary Unitarianism as rooted in its history, yet moving into the future in freedom’.

Although I read the book straight through for the purposes of reviewing it, there are far more valuable ways of delving into its treasures. The sections are clearly set out in the ‘Contents’ page so whether you are looking for a suitable quote considering for example, ‘Community and covenant’ in Part 1 – *The Principles and Values of Unitarianism*, or ‘I am a humanist Unitarian’ in Part 2 – *Unitarian Diversity*, you can easily find exactly what you need. Part 3 – *Unitarian Perspectives*, and Part 4 – *How to live Unitarianly*, complete the main sections where you will find what is needed for that service, blog, newsletter article or to clarify a topic in a discussion group.



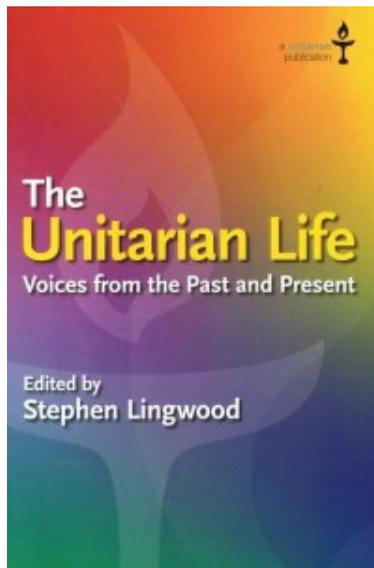
Many contributions are taken from history, many from the USA and other parts of Europe, reflecting the editor's own breadth of knowledge of both Unitarians and Universalists across the globe. Some names are current and you will recognise many from present Unitarians you may have heard or read.

The few lines of biography of each contributor are included at the end of the main text and give some insight to the breadth of material used.

Stephen has cleverly pin-pointed the need for dialogue between Unitarians, past and present, as we engage with each other, with this book and with those aspects of our lives which help to define us as individuals and a liberal and free Unitarian tradition. I would encourage all those of you, who have not yet got this book on your shelf to purchase a copy, as I feel sure it will survive well the test of time.

The price of: The Unitarian Life £9.99 plus postage and packing. Please telephone your order with card payment to Essex Hall on 020 7240 2384 Monday to Friday between 10.30 a.m. and 5.00 p.m

Joan Wilkinson

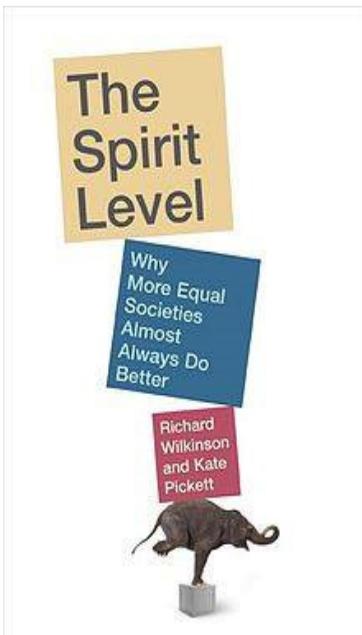


Inequality in Society Today

Does this concern you? Would you like to hear more about the causes and effects? Do you have the time to discuss informally with like-minded people?

Foy Conference 2017 is the answer. It will provide you with the perfect opportunity. Two experienced Study Leaders have offered to organise a study day on “The Causes and Effects of Inequality” as part of our Conference. The Conference begins on Friday 28th April and ends at lunchtime on Monday 1st May 2017 and the Study Day is on the Saturday. It will be possible to book just as a Day Visitor for the Study Day, or for the full conference. The venue is: the Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, Derbyshire.

You do not need to be a Foy member to attend.



Our study leaders are: **Kate E Pickett**, PhD FRSA FFPH Professor of Epidemiology and University Champion for Research on Justice and Equality at the University of York, and **Richard Wilkinson**, who is Professor Emeritus of Social Epidemiology at the University of Nottingham.

Kate and her partner Richard authored the renowned book *‘The Spirit Level’*. This book has had a considerable influence on the culture in the UK and beyond. It was rumoured that a copy had been given to every member of the cabinet. Kate and Richard’s research has shown beyond doubt that countries and states can correlate such things as poor health, crime, life expectancy

and other negative issues with the ratio of the wealth of the top of the society with the bottom. The current disenchantment with the political elite and even Brexit might be traced to the negative impact of inequality in the UK and USA. But the conclusion that the negative effects relate not only to the poor but to the wealthy too is stunning. They have shown that it is not lack of absolute income that creates negative effects but the comparison between the incomes of the top quintile and the bottom quintile.

Tony Cann will take a session on 'Inequality in Education.

We are very lucky to have Kate and Richard with us at Foy. You can also hear Kate when she gives the Penal Affairs Panel lecture at the General Assembly in Birmingham ***'Gone too far? – the impact of inequality'***.

Kate is also a founder member of the Equality Trust. See www.equalitytrust.org.uk and Alliance for Sustainability & Prosperity www.asap4all.org

To request a Booking Form for the Foy Conference please contact the Conference Secretary, Joan Partington on (01228)670565. Email : coljopartington@gmail.com

For updates about the conference check our **Foy Society** face book page.
Hazel Warhurst



Foy Conference, 2017

Inequality in Society Today



Non-members of Foy welcome, 28th April-1st May at The Nightingale Centre

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Would you like to hear about causes and effects?

A chance to discuss this informally with like-minded people.

Two experienced Study Leaders

Authors of the book "The Spirit Level"

Kate Pickett and her partner Richard Wilkinson authored the renowned book *'The Spirit Level'*, which correlates such things as poor health, crime, life expectancy and other negative issues with the ratio of the wealth of the top of the society and the bottom. It concludes that the negative effects relate not only to the poor but to the wealthy too. It is not lack of absolute income that creates negative effects but the comparison between the incomes of the top and the bottom quintiles.

Tony Cann will take a session on "Inequality in Education"

To request a Booking Form for the Foy Conference please contact the Conference Secretary Joan Partington on **01228 670565**

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*Liking those who value Freedom, Reason and Tolerance in
Religion*