

NUF

Newsletter!



New Beginnings

- *Committee News*
- *Instructions for Life*
- *Church of the Larger Fellowship*
...and more

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

President's Ponderings

Over the past weeks I have been pondering on the theme for the Group Renewal Weekend in October at The Nightingale Centre: **Endings and Beginnings**. Why should that be, you may ask? Entering a new year only begins at the ending of the previous year. The rhythm of the gardening year seems to be cyclical with constant endings and beginnings. We look forward to seeing the snowdrops and the first spring bulbs making their appearance to signal that winter is ending.

At the AGM in April, I will stand down as your President and hand over to Howard Wilkins, the NUF's long-standing Membership Secretary. This may be an ending for me, but it will be a beginning for Howard. It will also be a beginning for me, a beginning which will become clearer for me in time.

At the recent small creative writing group, led by one of the Castle Donington members, we were set the task of writing a short story of exactly 50 words, excluding the title. Without thinking of endings and beginnings, I realized that the story I had written illustrated this theme exactly:

Towards the Light

*If only I could stay. The tunnel is dark and threatening. The walls press in and I fear death. Don't let me go into the unknown alone.
One final push and I rush towards the light. The cord is severed. I see the light and announce my arrival with a howl.*

It can be a fearful place when changes seem to be happening too quickly, when we have to move on from a place of comfort and security. We neither knew what lay ahead of us before we were born and neither do we know what lays ahead of us when we die. But being fearful of the next step in a life of endings and beginnings risks the danger of missing what we presently have, being grateful for it, living it well knowing that there will always be more endings and beginnings not yet known to us.

Whether you are at a beginning or an ending in your lives, I wish NUF members and friends a successful transition between the old and the new as we move forward in our many and varied ways.

Joan Wilkinson



Secretary's Notes

In October I travelled to Italy. I have been to Italy several times before but never to Tuscany. What delights awaited me! Not only the cloudless blue October sky and mid 20s temperatures, but the beautiful and historic towns of the Tuscan region.

One of these was Siena - a city with medieval buildings and a Gothic town hall. A highlight for me was the Basilica Cateriniana San Domenico - the church of St Catherine of Siena. This also is a Gothic building and it houses relics of St Catherine - one of the two patron saints of Italy, the other being St Francis of Assisi. I noticed that in this church there are no pews or seating for a congregation, and was told that everyone stands. I believe this is what used to happen in our country, but I don't know how many people would enjoy standing through a service nowadays! One of the main draws to the church seems to be the relics of St Catherine. I saw these but will not go into detail here as the sight of them is not for the faint hearted!

Tuscany is a truly beautiful place with many small towns surrounded by Roman walls, and quaint little cobbled streets and intriguing shops. Florence is one of those towns, with its galleries full of works by famous artists and sculptures - Leonardo da Vinci, Botticelli, Michelangelo, and many more, and across the Arno river is the amazing Ponte Vecchio, the bridge that has survived since medieval times.

I loved every minute of my Italian holiday, and hope that I can go back there some day and see more of its delights - the beautiful countryside, the quaint towns, the friendly people and the amazing architecture and works of art. It was a truly beautiful and spiritually uplifting experience. However, the time sped by and I was once again in the midst of an English autumn, then winter, and so to the present. I expect that soon our readers will be planning their 2018 holidays. I hope that whatever you have planned will be as enjoyable and memorable as was mine.

Janet Lythgoe

NEW MEMBERS

- A warm welcome is extended to our new members Anne Griffin and 'Didymus', Ringwood Unitarians

Dates for your diary...

NUF AGM - 5.30 pm on Wednesday 4th April

The above will take place during the **GA Meetings** 4th – 7th April at Staverton Park Estate, Daventry Road, Daventry NN11 6JT. For further information go to the GA website: <https://unitarianmeetings2018.com/> See the last issue of the *NUF Newsletter*.

Group Weekend – Friday 26th October to 28th October

This is a new initiative when four societies/groups will be coming together to offer an exciting programme. To secure a place early booking is advised. Each of the four groups will be leading a session: The NUF, Unitarian Earth Spirit Network, Unitarian Peace Fellowship and the Unitarian Renewal Group.

A booking form can be found on the NUF website at: <http://www.nufonline.org.uk/NUF2015/pdfs/Booking%20Form.pdf>

Please fill it in and return it to Joan Wilkinson either by email or post, otherwise ring Joan on: 01332 814055. Ring the Nightingale Centre to book your room.

Dalai Lama

The following is taken from a Nepalese good luck mantra.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR LIFE

1. Take into account that great love and great achievements involve great risk.
2. When you lose don't lose the lesson.
3. Follow the three R's: respect for self, respect for others and responsibility for all your actions.
4. Remember that not getting what you want is sometimes a wonderful stroke of luck
5. Learn the rules so you know how to break them properly.
6. Don't let a little dispute injure a great friendship.
7. When you realise you've made a mistake, take immediate steps to correct it.
8. Spend some time alone each day.
9. Open your arms to change but don't let go of your values.
10. Remember that silence is sometimes the best answer.
11. Live a good honourable life. Then when you get older and think back you will be able to enjoy it a second time.
12. A loving atmosphere in your home is the foundation for your life.
13. In disagreement with loved ones, deal only with the current situation.
14. Share your knowledge. It's a way to achieve immortality.
15. Be gentle with the earth.
16. Once a year, go some place you've never been to before.
17. Remember that the best relationship is one in which your love for each other exceeds your need for each other.
18. Judge your success by what you had to give up in order to get it.
19. Approach love and cooking with reckless abandon.



Beginnings

Tough oughts
these January hymns to perfection.

But if *oughts* become *wants*,
I will find a way to make them happen.

I *want* to be a human being
instead of being a human text message.

I *want* to locate the wisdom between my
thoughts
instead of just thinking them.

I *want*
to go slower;
to take more notice,
to simplify.

So I'll defy the odds;
I'll defy the gods,
I'll sing my own song.

Elizabeth Brownhill

NUF COMMITTEE REDUCTION:

The NUF membership has been falling for some time and now represents less than a third of what it was in 1990s. Each year the committee struggles to find sufficient volunteers to fill executive posts and committee members and in some cases has to resort to co-opting members when there are insufficient volunteers.

Last year at the 2017 AGM in Birmingham it was proposed that the number of members required on the committee be reduced from the current 12 to 8. The committee has now deliberated on the matter and are formally proposing to seek permission from the Charities Commission to make this amendment to its Constitution.

To do so it is necessary for the Membership to agree to the Committee's proposal and to this end you will find, enclosed with your copy of this Newsletter, a form on which you can add your agreement or otherwise. I

would appreciate if you could record your decision on the voting slip and return it as soon as possible to me, your secretary, at the address shown, not later than 30th April 2018.



The result of the vote will be published in the Summer 2018 edition of the Newsletter.

Thank you.

J. Lythgoe (Sec)

If Only ***A meditation one wet winter's morning***

If only...
I could live with uncertainty.
I want to know:
What happens when I die;
Do I have free will;
Could I have done better,
Loved better.

If only...
I knew.
But – would there then be hope,
Expectation, surprises,
Feeling good, acknowledging guilt.
No.
So – perhaps I accept uncertainty!

Pat Caddick

Minister's Page

After Christmas we were invited out for a meal with friends. Three of them are Unitarians and one isn't. The first question I was asked by all of them was, 'What made you become a minister?' For some reason it seems to fascinate people. In my case, I put it down to both nature and nurture. I come from a line of ancestors who were all in the church, though they were in the Church of England. Maybe I carry the ministry gene? Then there is something in me that doesn't like to see unhappiness and something in me that wants to help when anyone doesn't know what to do about some problem or other. Lastly, I feel that there is a dimension in each of us that is spiritual.

Our spiritual dimension helps us through life and gives an inner strength and a more caring outlook on the world. Armed with this optimism I joined the Unitarian ministry after some training and joined a congregation. I soon discovered I wasn't perfect, but I did do my best to help those I was asked to serve.

It is a somewhat privileged position to be in a vocation where you can be trusted with the intimate details of a person's life or be part of their celebrations or tragedies.

I soon learned too that no one in this life fits the advertisers model of the perfect person. We don't fit in their aircraft seats, we don't have the perfect figure. Often, we don't have the perfect family with the perfect car going on the perfect holiday. The inadequacies we are born with, or pick up en route through life, are challenges to accept or overcome. It has been my experience that those who cope best are those who feel part of a loving community, a church or family, and those who engage with that spiritual dimension. Engage through prayer or studying scripture or taking part in worship. The best advice I had from a retired minister as I started out was, 'Just listen to what they have to say to you!' And I think we can all help each other if we do that.

Worship Page

I go to church almost every Sunday. I meet the same people week after week. We have a cup of tea together afterwards and I go home. The services are the usual hymn sandwich of hymns, prayers, readings and a sermon. Sometimes they are interesting. Sometimes they are exhilarating and sometimes they are dull, but I keep going.

I had found this Unitarian chapel almost by accident and enjoyed the first service I attended. It seemed to speak to me, so I continued to go. As I became settled I half expected someone to come and ask me why I came or even what I believed that made me come here, but no one did. I am not sure that anyone knows what I really believe.

So, I asked myself the question. The answer was that I didn't really know. Maybe I come here because my faith is not openly challenged. I feel myself nourished by the hymn singing and the prayers and the readings and the sermon and I can't really explain why. The fact is I don't need to. The people, the building, the words and music lift my spirit and set my feet on a good path through the coming week. Worship touches my life against a mystery. I think it must reach into deep places in my soul.

Prayer

Find a moment of quietness and step away from distractions. Let the world roll by for these moments with its noise and its demands. Think of peace, a time and a place that is your very own. Think of colours and warmth. Think of the comfort that love brings. Now think of those whose love fills your spirit with warmth. Thank them for that love and send your own to them. Think of those who are feeling restless or unhappy and who are too consumed with worry to send you their love. Send your own love to them sevenfold. Imagine there are angels who silently embrace frightened and broken hearts. Pray to the angels and add your love to their love. For these moments become part of the angel's worlds, share with them in that love which comes from heaven and let it fill your heart with song.
Amen

Church of the Larger Fellowship A UU Congregation Without Walls

**www.clfuu.org
www.questformeaning.org**

Just call me "Dr. Riley." While you weren't looking, Starr King School for the Ministry presented me with an honorary degree last week!

Since I am not an academically inclined kind of person, always preferring to learn by doing more than by reading, this kind of doctorate is the only kind I'll ever get. Needless to say, I'm honoured and thrilled. Especially because, when I was a 25 year old just contemplating ministry for the first time, I applied to Starr King to study and was turned down! I shared that with the students in my acceptance speech, figuring they could all feel immediately superior to me.

While I was out in the Bay Area, at the annual Starr King symposium, which is a daylong learning institute for the extended community, I shared what I've learned in the seven and a half years I've been your minister-practical information that's generally not what you learn when you get a doctorate. I structured my talk as "ten tips for creating spiritual community without walls." Without going through the entire 45 minute talk and slide show, here's what I talked about:

1. Mission must always be central.
2. Listen to feedback.
3. Find your people;
4. expect surprises.
5. Create a learning environment.
6. Fail quickly and forgive yourself.
7. Follow the energy!
8. Create strong relationship.
9. Co-create whenever possible.
10. Money is a BIG thing. But not the biggest thing.
11. Enjoy the ride!



As is true every day when I wake up and still when I go to sleep again, I feel I am the luckiest person in the job, doing the most interesting work with the most wonderful people. Purely grateful. Honours such as the one I received are the frosting on a very big and delicious cake of daily life!

Meg A Riley

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