

NUF

Newsletter!



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

Ministers Page

What does it mean to be a person of faith? Faith is a word like Love, one that has many shades of meaning. Faith can be trust or belief or absolute certainty. In religious terms it defines what a person ultimately believes in and that can be God or a prophet, or the teachings and miracles attached to them.

Martin Luther said that faith is 'justified' through Grace. Grace is basically gods love being felt and accepted as a gift. The Unitarians of old felt that was a kind of easy option. You could accept the Grace and then sit back in your armchair, saved. The Unitarians took a verse out of the Epistle of James as their mantra, that faith was 'justified' by works, that is doing good in the community and the world.

At the Unitarian annual meetings I listened to a talk by Paul Rasor. He said the modern world was following the mantra that 'There is no such thing as society' only a worldwide population of consumers who were being encouraged to purchase and so make the rich richer. To me he painted a frightening picture of multinational corporations putting pressure on governments to follow their business models and to vilify the weak and unfortunate as undeserving. He said this 'Neoliberalism' divides people into angry factions, the extreme right wing nationalists and the angry poor. The super rich say there is no alternative to the 'consumer society'. Paul Rasor said, 'Yes there is'. It is the rebuilding of communities where we look after one another and where we jump off the consumer treadmill. He said that this is what Unitarians have always done. Their faith is in community. A just Society is where

A just Society is where everyone feels rich. It echoed my own view that in our congregations we do not challenge each other or anyone about what they believe or what is their faith. We are comfortable there because we are amongst like minded people whose faith is made stronger by caring for the world they live in. The foundation of Unitarianism is community, caring for the wellbeing of one another and taking that beyond the boundaries of ourselves.

Worship Page

May you feel loved and may you feel happy. Whether you feel loved by another or by your god or by life itself, you should be on the way to feeling happy. On a YouTube channel that I follow it said happiness starts not on the surface but deep within the spiritual self. Happiness starts with learning to love yourself. The two combine to radiate from you like an aura and you are felt to be a positive person. Just think how well we ourselves respond to anyone who has that positive aura.

May our worship focus on building that interior core of love and happiness.

Prayer

We have our strengths and we have our weaknesses. We make mistakes. We do what we shouldn't and don't do what we should. Because we are human we are not perfect but in our prayers and in our lives let us try to make amends and set ourselves the higher standards of love and care for those whose lives we touch. May our prayers find answers when we reach for the divine within the great universe.

Tony McNeile

The Unitarian General Assembly 2018

I felt honored and privileged to have been chosen to attend this year's GA as a delegate of the NUF. This was the second GA I had attended, the first being last year when it was held in Birmingham. I thoroughly enjoyed that one and was thrilled to be going again.

The venue this year was the De Vere Staverton Estate, Daventry, and the hotel was welcoming and comfortable. Staff were helpful and the food was excellent. The business (plenary) meetings were held in a large room close to the main areas, with the 'breakout' sessions for the different groups being held in various parts of the hotel. These took some time to find, initially, but I gradually got my bearings!

The first meeting I attended upon arrival was the John Relly Beard lecture, given by Matt Carmichael on Rekindling the Spirit of Community in which he talked about spiritual activism, giving examples. The Opening Celebration, our first event in the plenary room, was staged by BUYAN (British (and Irish) Unitarian Young Adults' Network) where we learnt about the movement and its history. It was an excellent production. I attended all the business meetings and voted when required to do so. The motions were many and varied. The first one discussed was the motion on the grave dangers of nuclear weapons, another was to accept the changes to the length and format of the Annual Meetings, and a third to recognise the considerable contribution of the Rev Dr Ann Peart to Unitarians in the UK by naming her as an Honorary Member. There were many other motions which were discussed and voted upon throughout the business meetings of the three days.

One of the highlights of the business meetings was the Keynote Speaker, the Rev Dr Paul Rasor, who spoke on Faith without Certainty in Uncertain Times. He talked about the crises of our times - climate change, economic crises, etc and about three additional crises - Neoliberalism, Nationalism and Postmodern Theory. He spoke at length about these and quoted Robert Kennedy - 'There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why....I dream of things that never were, and ask questions.'

why not?' After his talk he took questions.

After all the business had been completed, the group photo had been taken and the new President, Joan Cook, had been appointed and installed, I was thrilled that the final hymn of the business meetings, was one of my favorites - Spirit of Earth, Root, Stone and Tree (Sing Your Faith, no 147). I was singing it in my head for days afterwards! It is stimulating to hear so many people singing after being used to small congregations.

During the three days I went to a number of 'breakout' sessions, although some that I would have liked to go to clashed with others. The NUF AGM took place on the first evening, followed by an interesting talk from Rev Ernest Baker on Unitarians and Social Responsibility. I elaborate more on this session in the minutes of the AGM elsewhere in this publication. The Historical Society looked at the impact of the Edict of Torda on Unitarians today in a talk by Rev Dr David Steers. He had recently attended celebrations in Romania marking the declaration of religious toleration in 1568.

Also, on the Thursday I attended the Simple Gifts meeting, where I learnt about the charity which is in Bethnal Green. Volunteers set up summer programmes, after school clubs, lunches, art and craft groups and drama groups, to name a few, for the local community. Later I visited the Inquirer reception where we were introduced to the committee, and another successful year of the publication was celebrated.

I visited another three 'breakout' sessions on the Friday - IARF (International Association for Religious Freedom), Findhorn Unitarian Network and the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network. Dr Paul Rasor, the GA Keynote Speaker, gave a talk for the IARF on Patterns on Regulation (of Religion in Europe). He has written about this subject, and the audience were informed that there are rules in most countries about religious matters, e.g. clothing and religious symbols, but the Netherlands is the least regulated, and history is very relevant to these patterns.

A most interesting talk at the Findhorn meeting gave insight into the lives of people living in the Findhorn Community near Inverness. Several attendees described their experiences at Findhorn. This was followed by their AGM. The final session, the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network, was led by Rev Tony McNeile. All sat in a circle and a typical opening to a UESN meeting was demonstrated, followed by some group activities and a talk by the leader on the Wheel of the Year. We finished with a meditation.

Between these meetings I helped behind the NUF stand and there was a lot of interest in the NUF shown by passers-by. I had a chance to look at other stands and learn about various groups, and collect literature. The book shop was also an interesting place to visit with new publications on display as well as many other books.

On the final evening of the GA, Kate Whyman led the Anniversary Service in which the choir sang an introit and an anthem most beautifully, and the Rev Danny Crosby delivered a moving address on Love. The time had come to pack our belongings in readiness for the journey home the following day. Another GA was over and it was time to put what we had learnt into action. I do hope I can go again next year!

Janet Lythgoe



Handing over

At a Unitarian Music Society Conference four years ago I happened on a conversation between certain NUF committee members who were also present. They were discussing the problem of finding a Treasurer and somehow I came out with the words 'I could help you out for a while' having formerly been a chapel treasurer for five years.

I wasn't at the time a member of NUF, although I had been for some time in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Every voluntary organisation, and even more so the smaller ones, have difficulty recruiting volunteers and when ALL the tasks (the main Officers) of that organisation are voluntary this is a real problem.

I put it down to the raising of the retirement age. Now all those vigorous men and women in their 60s instead of transferring their energies and experience to support local and national voluntary organisations, are still dragging themselves on the daily commute to jobs which their younger colleagues are eager to move into. *C'est la vie*, so 'a while' became almost four years. Now I have, halfway through our current financial year, handed over all the records to our new Treasurer. The past years' experience has shown that with new membership and renewal forms coming to the Treasurer they do not come in a neat group to be dealt with as a one-off task, but trickle in at all sorts of odd times (even some long-term members 'forgetting' to renew for a year or more!). This complicated and caused delays in the updating and recording of the membership, and as we are a widespread fellowship it is essential that we know not only who but where you all are. So, is it not a great idea now that our former Secretary and Newsletter Editor, having had a short break, is willing to take over not only as Treasurer but to combine this with Membership Secretary? Ken and I are of course still in touch (mail is still coming to me!) but he is already well into updating membership and looking into financial affairs.

Please support his work. I shall of course miss the mail that drops on my mat the day after I have done the banking – NOT!
Good Luck Ken, and thanks.

Valerie Walker

FOUR GROUPS WEEKEND

26th – 28th October 2018

Bookings are going very well but there are still some spaces left. If you intend to go, it is important you get your booking made quickly.

You can find a form on the NUF website at: <http://www.nufonline.org.uk/NUF2015/pdfs/Booking%20Form.pdf>

Please return the form to Joan Wilkinson and ring Stella at The Nightingale Centre to book your room. Details are on the form.

I look forward to seeing many NUF members at Hucklow in October, for what should be a full and satisfying weekend.

UKUTV Report from Joan Wilkinson

The team continue to be busy producing material for our members, who were not able to be present at the service or event, as well as featuring the regular Monthly Reflections, which can be seen on the front page of the NUF website: www.nufonline.org.uk

The following reflections can now be seen in the Meditation Archives at:

<http://www.nufonline.org.uk/NUF2015/medarchives.htm>

Our Minister, Tony McNeile, presents the **March Reflection:**

Here we are at the beginning of March still in our winter woolies. The first day of spring was obliterated by snow storms and arctic winds. We watched the snowdrops and the crocus disappearing under a blanket of snow. When I looked in last year's diary at February we were already digging over the allotment and preparing raised beds. This year it is still a bleak looking wasteland. My golf course has been closed more often than it has been open. I should be sad. I am sad. I feel for the people trapped in their cars by snow and I feel for all the people unable to fly off to where they planned

where they planned to go. I feel for the poor homeless who have to survive in the low temperatures.

Yet isn't there something incredibly beautiful in these winter scenes? The landscape takes on an unblemished look. Whether the sky is bright diamond blue or filled with threatening clouds, the world we inhabit becomes a work of art. Black and white pictures everywhere.

By the end of this month these thoughts of mine will be a distant memory. We will be expecting March to go out like a lamb and the work of art before us will be warm and filled with colour. The lambs will be in the fields, the grass will be growing and what are now stiff silent skeletal trees, will be loose limbed and showing a blush of spring green. The air will be warmer and we will be anxious to step outside and breathe it.

My hero, the writer John Muir worked tirelessly to preserve the American wilderness from an encroaching civilisation that only saw trees as worth so many dollars at the sawmill. Muir saw the open country as Gods creation. He felt its beauty as well as seeing it. Only a benign creator could put such detail into the beautiful world he wrote. As a child John Muir had been forced to learn the Bible off by heart. Often the words had been thrashed into him by his preacher father.

Those biblical words could not contend with the majestic presence of mountain tops, or granite cliffs that had been scoured smooth in the ice age and trees that had grown tall over centuries.

Where is God to be found? The Bible stories, particularly the New Testament do indeed point the way but for John Muir revelation came through experiencing nature as it was.

It reminded me of the best advice I had once, at a time when I was feeling frustrated with life, was 'to go outside and look. Look at the natural world'. Look closely and spend some minutes looking, absorb the feeling that you get. There comes a peacefulness, a calming of the spirit.

Whatever it is you gaze on, whether the vast horizon or the intimate detail of a flower, nature can reveal a spiritual presence that

that seems ageless and formless. It is the still small voice. Some will say that this is God and others it is only the Holy Spirit of God. Whatever we call this feeling from nature, let us keep it within our hearts and let it vaporise all our anger and frustrations, lift our own spirits and gently synchronise ourselves with the scene before us.

Whatever the weather, cold, beautiful, frustrating, warm, wet or exhilarating may you find that peace within it.

For the **April Reflection** we were pleased to host Richard Bober, who led us in meditation. Richard follows the Therevaden Buddhist meditation practice. Richard represents The Unitarian Meditational Fellowship: www.ukunitarians.org.uk/tmf .

The **May Reflection** takes a look at 'Crossing Bridges' and is presented by me, Joan Wilkinson.

BUILDING BRIDGES

In recent days we have seen the momentous meeting between the North and South Korean leaders. It seems that a great chasm has been bridged as the two men came together, crossing the border which has divided them for so many years. We often think of building bridges metaphorically, as an attempt to heal, broken relationships. In this case we must hope that the momentous meeting in Korea will be just the beginning of an ongoing process.

The two leaders understand and have lived through great changes in the history of Korea. They will need to be prepared to build bridges between the past and the future. It is unexplored territory and there are many obstacles to cross. They will need great courage and people around them, who are inspired to continue moving forward. Being filmed talking together on a bridge illustrates just how important symbolism can be. May they maintain a safe bridge of peace to surmount the many difficulties that will arise.

There is also the need for us to build bridges to cross over obstacles that stand in our way and which prevent us reaching new destinations. This is important to everyone but particularly to Unitarians who are always looking to introduce new ideas which will carry the

Unitarians who are always looking to introduce new ideas which will carry the movement forward. Like the leaders of North and South Korea we will need to take what is good from our history whilst not being afraid of the new.

Crossing bridges can be a challenge at the same time as enticing. Will I be safe? Will I be able to cross back whenever I choose? These are just two of the questions I ask myself.

On reflection though it seems that life consists of crossing bridges - that is part of what it means to grow as a human being. We can't avoid living and learning. We cannot and should not hold back from building and crossing bridges and then moving on. Life isn't always safe.

Different circumstances call for different responses. Mostly we need to take time, gather material, plan the pathway and make approaches to the obstacle as well as we are able. The bridge is erected, strong and wide, allowing many to cross over confidently and safely for many years to come, knowing the dangers that have been and must be avoided in the future. At other times though, the terrain is too rough, the path too narrow allowing only the very able and the very brave to forge the way.

Yes, it can be dangerous to be the first individual or first group to build and test the bridge, but support and encouragement from those who also wish to overcome and cross over the obstacle can help hugely. We will also need help from those who have gone before. Crossing bridges is the time when faith, belief and positivity are essential, lessening the danger and ensuring the goal is reached.

There will always be bridges to build and cross in all areas of our lives, sometimes easy and sometimes hard. But if we stop building bridges we stop growing, living and learning.

I am not one of the skillful or the strong, but I can still do what I can to help those who are, those who can build the bridges over which I hope to be one of the first to walk across. I will learn from them and trust to the lessons they have taught me.

In our lifetime we all have the opportunity, if we choose, to build or help others build bridges. We can stay where we are or build new

networks, relationships and communities, and grow and flourish.

UKUTV at the GA Meetings

This year the team were very busy filming various presentations from different Unitarian Societies and organisations – see links below:

NUF AGM Presentation: www.ukunitarian.tv?sach-2018 Rev Ernest Baker addresses 'Unitarian Faith and Social Responsibility, asking the question: 'Why Bother?'

Penal and Social Affairs Panel (PASP): www.ukunitarian.tv?fake-news John Lloyd being an eminent journalist since 1976 for the Financial Times on special subjects, co-founder of 'Reuters for the study of journalism', at Oxford; just a few of the many achievements of this speaker, spoke on the subject of: 'Fake News'.

Unitarian Historical Society: www.ukunitarian.tv?torda-transylvania was presented by Rev David Steers, who had been in Transylvania to celebrate the 450th Anniversary of the Edict of Torda.

Lindsey Press Publications: www.ukunitarian.tv?lindsey-diversity Rev Sue Woolley presented the anticipated book to the meeting: *Unitarians: Together in Diversity: A Survey of the Beliefs, Values and Practices of Contemporary British Unitarians*. The book is a result of a questionnaire, which was completed by many Unitarians in 2017. The results are well presented in the book, which I recommend to you. For £9.50 the book can be obtained from Amazon or by contacting Essex Hall on: 020 7240 2384, where you can purchase it using your credit/debit card.

Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies (USPS): www.ukunitarian.tv?psychical John Pickering, a member of Kendal Unitarian Ministry Team asked some searching questions in his presentation: 'Back to the Future: Beyond Belief & Reason: Unitarian Spirituality: What are we part of? What is our vision? Where are we going? Is it time for a reality check?'

Anniversary Service: www.ukunitarian.tv?anniversary18-service This is an inspirational service from beginning to end with the Service Leader, Rev Kate Whyman and Anniversary Preacher,

Service Leader, Rev Kate Whyman and Anniversary Preacher, Rev Danny Crosby, coming together to take our minds to 'Another Place'. Already this has been watched by 250 viewers and cannot be recommended highly enough to our readers.

Ceremony of thanksgiving, recognition & welcome: https://youtu.be/cUwCRjEiq_c This is the formal part of the Anniversary Service event, when retiring Ministers are shown appreciation for their work, and new ministers recognized and welcomed onto the Roll of Unitarian Ministers.



Secretary's Notes

Well, the GA has come and gone, and I attended as the NUF delegate. The NUF AGM took place on the first day of the GA with Howard Wilkins taking over as President from Joan Wilkinson, as well as taking on the role of Membership Secretary. Ken Smith will be taking on the Treasurer's role from Valerie Walker. There was a gift of thanks for both Joan and Valerie as they stepped down from the Committee, and then there followed an excellent speaker - Rev. Ernest Baker - who talked about Unitarianism and Social Responsibility, and asked a question "Y r u bovver'd wiv that?" Rev Baker actively promotes the ongoing support of Unitarians for 'Send a Child to Hucklow'. I shall say more about the GA elsewhere in this publication.

I hope you are able to continue making good use of the NUF website, with its many and varied facilities, including the forum for discussions, and past copies of the Newsletter and Viewpoint to read. The NUF also has a Facebook group for those able to access it.

Since I last wrote my 'Notes' the weather has improved and we can now look forward to holidays, be they long or short breaks or 'staycations'! The latter will be the one for me this year as I recover financially from building work! I love the warmer weather and to see the trees and flowers coming into bloom, and recently I spotted three roe deer in a field close to my home. It was a real privilege to see them. I have been trying to tempt the birds back into my garden since the disturbance caused by the building work frightened them away. They are gradually returning I am glad to say. Enjoy

work frightened them away. They are gradually returning I am glad to say. Enjoy the summer!

Janet Lythgote



Easter

"Watson I'm glad you are back. Pity you weren't here yesterday. The Bishop of Bradford came to consult about the greatest of mysteries, Easter and the resurrection. Please ask Mrs Hudson to bring in the tea and I will tell you the story."

Mrs Hudson had tea and cake ready to serve when Dr Watson entered the kitchen with Sherlock Holmes' s request.

"Thank you Mrs Hudson," said Holmes appreciating the small of freshly baked scones and lemon sponge cake.

"Can you bring the King James Bible with large print?" he asked Mrs Hudson. As she went to locate it she thought whatever will he do next ?

"Here it is Sir," she said placing it next the sponge cake on the big round mahogany table which was already covered in papers.

"Now Watson the Bishop of Bradford was already upset by the Bishop of Durham, Dr David Jenkins, who had said publicly that he didn't believe in the virgin birth when a new row erupted in the Church of England. Dr Jenkins gave an interview to the BBC on his beliefs. You and I might say lack of them! However in relation to the resurrection on Easter Sunday he is quoted as saying, " it is not a trick with dry bones!" The Bishop of Bradford along with many others took that to mean that David Jenkins doesn't believe in the literal resurrection of the body of Jesus and is mortified.

"Where do you come in ?" said Watson.

"Well Watson, traveling to the Middle East 2000 years after the event won't help. All we can do is study the biblical text or other sources from the same period and decide whether there is any foundation for the hymn which begins with the words; Christ the Lord is risen today, Hallelujah."

"Watson if we look at Matthews Gospel we see that Jesus knew that the Chief Priests and teachers of the law would condemn him to death and that the Gentiles would mock him, flog him and he would be crucified. He also predicted that after 3 days he would rise again. In the Gospel of John, Pilate, the Roman Govenor, says, '*you take him and crucify him. As for me I find no basis for a charge against him.*' Then Luke's Gospel says from noon until 3pm darkness came over the whole land and the temple curtain was ripped apart. Then Jesus shouted, '*Father into your hands I commit my spirit.*' Marks Gospel reports that Joseph of Arimathea bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen and place it in a tomb cut from rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance. Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of Joseph saw where Jesus was laid. Matthews Gospel tells how Pilate requested that the tomb be made as secure as you know how!

"So that was on Friday night," said Watson. Holmes nodded.

Then on Sunday morning when Mary Magdalene Mary mother of James and Salome brought spices to anoint the body of Jesus. They found the stone rolled away and a young man dressed in white sitting inside. They were scared but he said, "Don't be scared Jesus is risen! Go and tell his disciples and Peter that he is going to follow you to Galilee. " When she told the Disciples they did not believe it . Peter ran to the tomb and saw strips of linen lying inside but went away puzzled.

Dr Watson listened to the story he had first heard in his childhood. "Listen Holmes," he said, "It sounds more like resuscitation to me !" "Wait a minute !" said Holmes, "we haven't reached the end of the story. In John's Gospel the risen Christ simply says '*Mary*' and then tells her do not hold onto me for I have not yet ascended to the Father." Mary went to the Disciples and told them she had seen the Lord.

Just to confuse matters Matthews Gospel tells of an earthquake and that an angel with clothes as white as snow, came down from heaven and rolled back the stone and sat on it. Then Mary Magdalene went to tell the disciples. Jesus met them and the Disciples took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Chief Priests learning of the events gave money to soldiers to go around claiming that

claiming that Jesus disciples had come in the night and stolen the body.

"Holmes the story is confusing to say the least !" said Watson as Holmes filled his pipe and thought.

"Watson if the script was a complete fabrication the confusion would have been removed ! I am right aren't I ?" Watson nodded in agreement.

"In Luke's Gospel two Disciples were on their way to Emmaus talking about the events of the last few days. As they walked Jesus came up alongside but they thought he was a stranger. Jesus pretended he didn't know what had happened and asked them "What has happened ?" They explained that the chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and they crucified him. They explained that they expected Jesus to redeem Israel, probably meaning expel the Roman occupiers. "Our women folk went to the tomb and found it empty and saw a vision of angels who told us he is alive." They invited the stranger into the house they were visiting. When they sat down to eat the stranger broke bread, blessed it and gave it to the apostles; only then did they recognize it was Jesus.

"The puzzle deepens," said Holmes. "It cannot be that Jesus was resuscitated otherwise he would have had the same physical body as before crucifixion and be easily recognizable !" Watson remembered the story of Doubting Thomas told in John's Gospel 20 v 24 - 29. He said unless he saw the marks in Jesus's hands made by the nails and put my hands in his side I will not believe stories of resurrection.

At the next appearance of Jesus, Thomas was present. He invited Thomas to put his fingers in the holes where the nails had been and into his side. Thomas responded, "My Lord and my God." "It is interesting that there are so many apparently conflicting strands to the story," said Holmes.

"So we could simply report back to the Bishop of Bradford that there is no substantial evidence for the resurrection, but I think

that would be wrong !" said Holmes, relighting his pipe and creating plumes of smoke rising upwards in the twilight.

"Why ?" said Dr Watson.

"The evidence lies in what happens next!" said Sherlock feeling rather pleased with himself.

Luke's Gospel reports that he blessed the Disciples, was parted from them and carried up into heaven. They returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.

"That wouldn't convince me at all ! said Holmes, but what follows does !"

Before Jesus departed or ascended he gave his Disciples instructions as in Matthews Gospel 28 18 - 20. "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

"If Jesus had not risen then the Apostles would not have given their lives to fulfill these instructions," said Holmes tapping his pipe on the hearth to emphasize his point.

Stephen was the first believer put to death for his faith in Christ . He died by stoning and looked up into heaven and saw Christ. Simon Peter was eventually martyred in Rome and requested crucifixion upside down so his death would not be equal to that of Jesus. Andrew brother of Peter went to Patras and scourged, then tied to a cross to make death take longer. James, son of Zebedee was killed by a sword and beheaded. Philip the first of Jesus Disciples traveled to Egypt where he was scourged, imprisoned, then crucified. Bartholomew was skinned alive and beheaded in India. Thomas preached in Greece and India and died with a spear wound. Matthew was martyred in Ethiopia by a stab to the back. Simon preached in Africa and was crucified in 74 AD. John was the only disciple who died peacefully and his death was in Patmos, a Greek island around 100 AD.

"I ask you Watson whether if Jesus death was the end

"I ask you Watson whether if Jesus death was the end whether the apostles would have bothered to take the Gospel to the ends of the then known world and die in the effort?"

" So Holmes the resurrection was not resuscitation but rather that Jesus took on a quasi-physical body when he rose from the dead."

Holmes nodded agreement and said, " we can write to the Bishop of Bradford and say it is true that the resurrection wasn't a trick with dry bones as the Bishop of Durham is quoted as saying. However that doesn't mean that David Jenkins does not believe in the resurrection but rather that he has a good theological understanding of it."

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National Unitarian Fellowship AGM at the GA Meetings in April 2018

The real Unitarian 'outreach' group held one of the first meetings at the Assembly. Those present were mainly members of congregations and societies, the nature of the NUF being such that membership is aimed at those who are unable, or unwilling, to attend conventional centres of worship so rarely can/do any attend the General Assembly Meetings.

Reaching out to these, our like-minded but scattered friends, via the quarterly newsletter and Viewpoint journal as well as online is the aim of the Fellowship, although happily there are also Fellowships who are able to meet in groups in some areas.

Outgoing President Joan Wilkinson's welcome gave a brief outline of the previous year, committee changes, remembrance of those members deceased, and also told those present of the Small Groups Weekend* to be held at The Nightingale Centre from 26-28 October 2018. She introduced Howard Wilkins as the new President and Janet Lythgoe as Secretary and also said that Ken Smith was to become Treasurer and would be combining the position with that of Membership Secretary (a new and practical arrange-

arrangement).

Our Minister Tony McNeile thanked Joan for her years of commitment to NUF. Since the 1990s she has organised and encouraged the work of Fellowship groups as well as NUF literature and online, acting tirelessly as Secretary and latterly as President. She continues now as Editor of Viewpoint. Also a founding member of UK Unitarian TV she is still active with their northern team.

Tony presented Joan with a thank-you (Garden Centre) voucher from the committee, and also to my surprise as outgoing Treasurer (after just four years, nothing to compare with Joan's long service) I received a book token (Waterstone's here I come).

Our invited speaker the Rev Ernest Baker, retired minister of Underbank Chapel, Stannington, was introduced. Ern and I have been friends since student days; 1961, my first year as a Unitarian (when there was even a University of London Unitarian Society!) and I knew to expect an intellectually researched but accessible discourse.

'Unitarians and Social Responsibility', with the more down-to-earth sub-title 'y r u bovver'd wiv that' (very Ern that).

As the long-serving Secretary of the Send a Child to Hucklow charity Ern has for many years been involved in the administration of sending groups of children from disadvantaged backgrounds for holidays to The Nightingale Centre (he hopes that you, your congregation, support this charity).

He felt that being a Unitarian implied a commitment to social responsibility, that this secretarial task, often very demanding of his time and energy when he was a minister as well as now in his retirement was a 'no brainer'.

So the 'why bother' question.

Referring to both Christian scripture, including the original Greek, and to the reflections of theologians and philosophers, our speaker explored the motivations behind the reasons and feelings on 'why'

explored the motivations behind the reasons and feelings on 'why' so many of us take on voluntary responsibilities. Is it an altruistic desire to do good works, or are we displaying selfless conviction when really we may just be seen as 'worthy'? How often is the motivation 'what is in it for me?'

These questions seem to me a need a longer session and wider discussion, not something that I can successfully or accurately précis here. To repeat one of the quotes 'We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realising that. This enables us to do something and to do it very well' (Oscar Romero). Old friend Ern, you have stirred up this listener's thoughts!

* if interested in the week-end contact Small Groups organiser,
joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk
Valerie Walker

A slightly edited version of this article appeared in the 5 May 2018 issue of The Inquirer, the fortnightly Unitarian journal.

Janet Lythgoe



TO OUTGROW THE PAST

By William Laurence Sullivan

To outgrow the past but not extinguish it;
To be progressive but not raw,
Free but not mad, critical but not sterile, expectant but not deluded;
To be scientific but not to live on formulas that cut us off from life;
To hear amidst clamor the pure, deep tones of the spirit;
To seek the wisdom that liberates and a loyalty that consecrates;
To turn both prosperity and adversity into servants of character;
To master circumstances by the power of principle,
And to conquer death by the splendor of loving trust:
This is to attain peace;
This is to pass from drear servitude to divine adoption;
This is to invest the lowliest life with magnificence.
And to prepare it for coronation.

GARDEN PRAYER

By David M. Horst

Early in the morning, before the children are awake and while the grass is still dewy, I like to walk in my garden. It's "my" garden only because it shares the same small plot of land my family and I inhabit. The garden does not really belong to me; I belong to it—at least for the short time I'm here. Today I'm still in my slippers and have my first cup of coffee in hand.

Much of what grows had been planted two or three homeowners ago, some I've planted since our arrival; but, if they belong to anyone or anything, the plants and flowering trees I come to see and smell — viburnum, dogwood, magnolia, and crab apple— belong to the sun and rain and soil. These living things are a beauty not of my making, though surely made of my desire.

At the moment, the rose bushes are in full burst of red and perfume. The hydrangeas are sure to open their mopsy heads as soon as the sun falls upon them. The weedy looking globe thistles are turning lovely blue and spiky. The foxglove, however, rules the garden. Its central stalk is five-foot high and heavy with pink, scoop-shaped blossoms with charming freckles inside. I am awed by the abundance.

I'd intended to walk the garden simply to observe and wonder. Ah, but there's a weed that must be pulled, a stray stem the needs to be pruned, a blossom drooping and fading that should be snipped. So I set down my coffee cup on the back porch, grab a small pail, and go to work. I end up with muddy hands, wet slippers, and a pail full of weeds and trimmings. Why can't I simply observe and wonder? Won't the beauty of my small garden world survive without me?

I step back to the porch to retrieve my coffee, now cold, stamp the dew off my slippers, and take one look back at the garden before I return into the house. The garden is no more beautiful now than when I first arrived. My weed pulling, pruning, and snipping haven't really improved the garden nor made that much of a difference as far as I know.

It's like prayer: The words I speak don't really change anything, but I know they change me.

A BOUQUET OF PEOPLE

By Claire Feingold Thoryn

Let us give thanks for a bouquet of people.

We give thanks for children. Like tulips and iris, they multiply around us, making the world ever more filled with color, beauty, and new life. May we bless them as they replant themselves ever further from us, knowing that they need their own space to grow into.

We give thanks for generous friends, as constant in bloom as echinacea and whose gifts lift up our body and spirit.

We give thanks for feisty friends as indomitable as geraniums, and for continuous friends, who, like bittersweet and ivy, hold on and never let go...and can never be gotten rid of.

For crotchety friends, as prickly as rosebushes; their beauty a secret that is only discovered through careful gardening.

For surprising friends, who at first glance seem dour and then blossom into joy as quickly as forsythia.

For funny friends, silly as snapdragons,

And serious friends, complex as chrysanthemums.

For comfortable friends, their gentle presence as soothing as the sweet smell of lilacs.

For stormy weather friends, who stand by us in hard times, like lily of the valley that cannot be deterred by shade or shadow.

For old friends, nodding like sunflowers in the evening-time

And young friends coming on fast as phlox.

For friends as unpretentious as dogwood,

as persistent as pachysandra,

as steadfast as azalea,

and who, like snowdrops, can be counted on to see you through the winter and remind you that spring always comes.

For loving friends, who wind around us like wisteria and embrace us, despite our blights, wilts, and witherings,

And, finally, for forget-me-not friends, gone but never forgotten.
Their beauty lives on in our memories and hearts.

For this bouquet of people, who brighten our lives each in their
own way, we give thanks.
Amen.



INTO THE WORLD SINGING

By Dawn Skjei Cooley

Let us go out into the world singing.

Let us go out into the world singing songs that proclaim liber-
ty.

Songs that turn ashes into garlands

Songs that bind up the afflicted and those who mourn.

Songs that, like oaks, have roots that go deep and stand
strong.

Let us go out into the world singing.

We know these songs. They vibrate through time, in our very
souls.

They are the songs that give us life.

They are the songs that give us meaning.

They are the songs that give us purpose.

Now it is our turn, to take these life-giving songs out into the
world.

Let us go now—singing these songs with voices deep and
strong.

And may the world join us in praise and in celebration and in
love.

Amen.



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