

National Unitarian Fellowship

Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarians
and Free Christian Churches

Newsletter

Issue 438

Spring 2019



'Commentary on Social Action' - Valerie Walker

'Light Creeping in' - Rev Tony McNeile

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

Registered Charity No. 1040294

Editorial

Members will be sorry to hear that Mattie Pugh, who has edited the *Newsletter*, for several years, has reluctantly decided she can no longer remain as our editor. I'm sure everyone would wish me to thank her for successfully producing publications, which were always pleasing to the eye and interesting to read. Mattie is young, with many demands on her time. We wish her well, wherever life may take her.

Without having someone to step into her shoes quickly, John and I will jointly edit and put together this edition in a much shorter time than we would choose. Unless there is a member who would like to consider becoming a permanent editor, it has been agreed that in the future the two NUF publications, ***Newsletter and Viewpoint*** will be combined in ***News and Views***. Members won't receive less reading material but as presently we distribute both publications together it makes sense to combine the two.

In this posting you are receiving the *Annual Report* for 2018. For those planning to attend the **NUF AGM, where Rev Anthony Howe will be the speaker, the details are as follows: Thursday, 18th April at 1030 am. at Birmingham Hilton Metropole, National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, B40 1PP.** The GA Meetings begin after lunch on Tuesday 16th April and end before lunch on Thursday 18th April.

J & J Wilkinson

SECRETARY'S NOTES

I expect some of our members will be planning, or have already planned, their holidays for this year. Last summer I had a short break in Anglesey to see its historic sites. I spent happy days trudging through fields and over stiles, searching out the stone circles and other interesting historic places. I hope to go again and continue my search.

October brought the Four Groups weekend at The Nightingale Centre. What a fabulous weekend that was! I hope it can become a regular event.

Where will I be going this year, I wonder? I have travelled quite widely but there are still places I would love to visit. After having quite a lot of work done on my house it is a matter of saving the pennies....

Janet Lythgoe



Four Groups Service 2018

(Photo courtesy of John Midgley)

Minister's Page

Rev Tony McNeile



We have had a trauma in our family with one of the grandchildren. There was a crisis and then followed the aftermath which means for everyone involved what was once a normal life is normal no more. The landscape of their lives has changed just as the Tsunami changes the shoreline. There is a new normal which everyone of us has to adjust to. In time of course it should all settle down and the family return nearly to the lifestyle they had before. What has come to the fore is the importance of family. Nearly everyone rallied round and supported one another, did shifts on hospital visiting etc. We all became a little closer.

Friends too played their part. Because they are one step removed from the dynamic of emotions within the family, friends are only concerned with helping and supporting their friend. That has been so valuable. Our friends certainly kept us on course and still do.

True friends offer unconditional love. Friendship is about understanding, being present and willing to listen.

Quite often the question we ask ourselves is 'Who are my true friends?' But it would be more truthful to ask 'Who am I a true friend to?'

It could start by making a resolution about friendship, to decide not to be a competitive friend with the people we call friends.

Sometimes we use our friends to stroke our own egos and reassure ourselves of our status in the world. It would be more fulfilling to be a caring friend, to encourage and support all their efforts and listen to them if things start to go pear shaped. The result is that when we care about other people, we find our own lives enriched.

Worship Page

‘Faith, Hope and Money. These three, but the greatest of these is money’. I read that in the introduction to one of George Orwell’s books. When you are a bit short of money this adulterated version of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians seems to ring very true. Money sets the standard in the modern world but unfortunately the supply of it is very unevenly distributed. Lack of money can be soul destroying as well as health destroying. In the world of three legged stools, lack of money kicks one of the legs away.

But the best three-legged stool is built of the three ‘C’s; Companionship, Community and Contentment. It is only the occasional person who can live without companions or community and still be content. Most of us need all three of those ‘C’s. The greatest of these is Contentment. If we can understand ourselves and be able to live with who we are - or change to become the person we want to be, then the other two easily fall into place. The road to contentment can pass through faith, prayer, meditation and study. It is the best goal to seek and more satisfying than money.

Prayer

The chill of winter is but a memory. Around us the natural world is alive. Colour and vitality abound. Let us tune into the world around us, step aside from the media stories with their speedy sensations and lustful tragedies. Focus instead on the movement of the trees, the flow of the stream or the tide moving forward and back on the seashore. Pause to look at the sky and the floating clouds. Listen for the songs of the birds and feel the earth being nourished by the rain. We belong to the pulse of natural life too. It calms our thoughts, balances our emotions. Whoever else you pray to, pray also to the spirit of life in the natural world. Allow it to absorb you and you absorb it.

Tony McNeile

Personal Profile

It seems very strange to be writing a personal profile to let members know who I am. After many years of volunteering for various jobs in the Fellowship, some may probably feel they know me only too well and wish I wouldn't write so much and so often. Editing the *Viewpoint*, being my latest role, is a privilege I continue to enjoy, appreciating the support and willingness of those I manage to cajole into writing. They have maintained an excellent standard for the NUF and are a joy to work with albeit briefly.

I would have preferred to see more people coming forward for

election, but I do understand that the nature of this Fellowship is to reach out to those who are isolated for whatever reason and members of congregations; the former often being unable and the latter already too busy working in other capacities for their chapels or the wider movement. However, if there is anyone out there, who feels they can help the Fellowship by becoming more involved, I know that this would be welcomed by all those presently occupying roles to ensure the NUF continues. If I am successful in becoming a committee member again, I can assure readers that I will do the job to the best of my ability and support our Officers whenever I am able.

Joan Wilkinson

ALEX ON MY MIND

Everyone can
All become vegan
If we want.
I don't.
I'm a flexitarian
Unitarian.
Seriously.

By Rev Phil Silk

Social Action

A reflection on Tony Cann's article in the Winter 2018/19 Viewpoint.

Reading Tony's words, I felt that much of what he wrote were exactly my words, my views and my attitude towards the small world around me, as well as the wider one we all share.



Unlike Tony I do not live within a close Unitarian community, nor am I within easy reach of one.

I am fortunate that I am in contact with Unitarian friends and in The Inquirer and other journals I have seen reports of the diverse 'social action' of many Unitarians around the UK, I have no doubt that members of every Chapel and Fellowship give their time and raise money for local and national causes as well as Unitarian ones. Whether as individuals - not as members of their chapel, not as Unitarians – they are involved in other forms of voluntary activity, who knows?

How does what I hope we all accept as the core of being a Unitarian, the tenets of reason and tolerance, appear in our local communities or at work? Does it make us different to our neighbours, others in our towns and villages? I think not.

As far as I am concerned it matters not one jot whether someone is a Unitarian, or - as we like to quote 'of any Faith, or

none'. It is quite interesting, quite puzzling indeed, to see who feels they want, or need, to give their time and/or expertise to others? I live in a Buckinghamshire village and in my own particular local 'social action' I am joined by people who do not even know what 'Unitarian' means and probably would think us very odd! Why do these men and women - mostly retired and some nearer 90 than 80, let alone 70 or 60! - want to help others? The retirement situation is what allows the time (time and availability is a prerequisite for this involvement), but there seems no definitive answer or reason to the WHY. It certainly is not only retired people who volunteer their time and their energies to help others and to raise money for charities. I cannot define a 'type' of person, there isn't one, it is a mystery, but how marvellous it is.

I have written more fully in a separate piece about my own local community involvement for the possible inclusion in the current issue of Viewpoint so will conclude briefly that for me, as Tony also said, the feeling of happiness that one gets from helping others makes me feel better. I freely admit it is good for me (living alone as I do) to get out of the house, have the commitment to be somewhere else at a certain time, for a specific reason. It also means that I meet people who I would never have otherwise encountered, hear stories I would never have heard, appreciated the struggles and triumphs of other lives. As the saying goes, 'it works both ways'.

Valerie Walker

February 2019

Tulip - Resurrection

Three heads bowed,
cowed by thoughts
of the executioner's death blow
for the crime of nothing.

Three heads bowed
like thunder-tongued priests
bending from their cloud-high pulpits
to indoctrinate the earthy masses.

I transplanted the restricted blooms,
set them free in a second vase
with water to drink, air to breathe.

Then the miracle came to pass:
water rose;
stems regained their strength;
healthy, pink-faced
heads were held high.

Elizabeth Brownhill

(Castle Donington Fellowship)

31.01.19



NUF Video Monthly Reflections Report – Joan Wilkinson

The January Reflection was written and presented by Joan Wilkinson with Rev Tony McNeile writing and presenting the February Reflection. If you would like to contribute to this regular monthly spot on the NUF website and UKUnitarianTV website please do get in touch with Joan: joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk

January – Hope and Gratitude

Joan Wilkinson

www.ukunitarian.tv?nuf-jan19



As we come to the New Year, I find myself looking back at the year just gone, remembering so many good things that have happened but also the not so good. Losing my sister in September reminds me of the last time we celebrated the New Year together – her childlike excitement at seeing another year of surviving the cancer which would finally claim her life. Loss and life will always remain close bed-fellows but it is the image of celebrating the coming of a New Year with those who are close to us, which remains with me at this time of welcoming in 2019.

Whatever our last year has brought, there is the thought that as we move forward the days will become lighter and new life will constantly emerge. Walking round the garden only a few days before Christmas I felt an upsurge of joy to see that the many spring bulbs I had planted in the Autumn, were already above ground. No doubt there will be many cold snaps to delay their growth, but nevertheless I felt this to be a sign that the dark

days will pass.

2018 has not been a good year in the world, as war has killed and maimed many, and millions of people are without homes and food. Politicians at home and abroad cannot work together leaving the people they are supposed to care for, in their ordering of society, disillusioned. Seasons are in disarray due to climate change with leaders of nations shrugging off their responsibilities to even discuss the ways in which our planet can be cared for or failing to notice that our seas are awash with plastics, which we carelessly toss away without thought.

And yet there are, as there have always been, voices calling in the wilderness. We must take heed of these voices as we move forward into the New Year. Many, many times it is the young who are showing us the way, the young who will be here long after I have gone. It is to these I look, as we enter 2019. It is these who give me hope and who demonstrate that life is indeed a precious gift and one we should always be grateful for.

So, whilst recognizing what has gone before we can face the future with hope, in fact we must face the future with hope and gratitude for all that is good and all that which will make the world a better place for all. The daffodils will continue to bloom in the spring.

May I wish you all joy and peace for 2019.

February – Time to Notice More Light Creeping in

Rev Tony McNeile

www.ukunitarian.tv?nuf-feb19



Welcome to February. It might still be feeling like winter, but February brings a change to the Earth. Have you noticed the snowdrops showing their faces? Have you noticed the green shoots appearing in the once dead looking soil? February is a change month. The air around us might still feel like winter but the soil is warmer.

The country dwellers of old celebrated one of their festivals at the beginning of February. It is half way between the winter solstice that has passed and the vernal equinox to come. The birds are looking forwards, beginning to pair up and start building nests. The ewes in the field are beginning to lactate in preparation for the birth of their lambs. There is a definite feeling that the wheel of the year has turned away from deep midwinter. Not surprising then that we humans should be thinking about Valentine's Day.

It is a change in mood which can go unnoticed unless we look for it. So, let's begin this month by looking for those secret signs that the earth is preparing for spring. And let us reflect on how it changes our own mood. Most of us get fed up at the beginning of the year. After all the spends and festivities of Christmas, many will feel the winter blues around them and the whole world seems sad and cheerless. But just in time comes February,

herald of returning life and warmth. Time to let go of the dark, celebrate the lengthening days.

Of course, we do not always notice the change because centuries of civilization have dulled our instincts, so we miss the new smells and the new energy around us. And we are thinkers too. We start a dialogue with ourselves trying to understand our moods and our blues. We cross examine ourselves about every answer and ponder all the nuances of our replies. That's what being human is. We look inward more often than outward.

Sometimes then it is a good idea to set a diary date, and say, look it is the first of February. Time to let go of the blues and start looking for snowdrops. Time to notice more light creeping in.

If you are a church-goer, you might be celebrating St Brigid's Day. She was a herald too. Irish people believed that she flew around the country in spirit form blessing every child that she passed by. She never missed one, and mums often put some of the child's clothing by the front door to make sure she didn't.

So, let us feel blessed too and say a prayer in February to bless all those we love and all the animals who are waking up to life, and to the seeds in the ground ready to burst into life.

Many blessings from myself Tony McNeile and all of us in the National Unitarian Fellowship.

Contributions for inclusion in the Summer Newsletter should be sent to editor by Wednesday 15th May 2019

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Linking those who value Freedom, Reason and Tolerance in Religion

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