

NUF

Newsletter!

LIVING FAITH
BRINGING HOPE
SHOWING LOVE

- Reflections
- Ponderings
- Poems
- ...and more

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

President's Ponderings

Since last writing, I have been gifted a book, for which I am very grateful.

Our Christian Faith,¹ produced by the Unitarian Christian Association, (UCA) arrived with my initial joining pack to the UCA. For too many years I have hung back from joining this group, believing that this might be an approach, which although without an official creed, may well feel too constricting. I suppose it has taken too many years to shake off the pain of walking away from Methodism, to follow a free faith. At the time, it felt as if what I heard preach was too limited, and although I felt at-one with my experience and understanding of Jesus, both his life and death, I could not accept the doctrine of atonement and a literal approach to understanding the Bible. That does not mean that throughout my Methodist journey nuggets of truth and value were missing, but rather incomplete and restrictive of a faith, which should be free to experience and understand the ongoing revelation of life. Revelation and reason never seemed to be in opposition to each other but part of the way we encountered the Divine in our lives.

For several years, I practised faith working in the community, thinking I could 'go it alone' with no need for being within a community of faith. Although this was a deeply fulfilling time it was with gratitude I responded to an invitation to join the NUF from my Open University tutor at that time. This was back in 1991 and so it has taken me twenty-seven years to feel sufficiently ready to join a group I imagined might be limiting, albeit in a Unitarian way.

On reading **Our Christian Faith** I recognised that the Association is made up of a wide range of Unitarian and Liberal Christians holding many perspectives. The book consists of twenty-eight contributions, of between just two and four pages, from Unitarians, many who I have known for a very long time but also a few names new to me. Several of them are members of this Fellowship, and it was good learn something more about their Christian Faith. At least one contributor worshipped each Sunday at an Anglican Church. Instead of the Association conveying

sameness, I finished the book feeling energised by the vibrancy and variety contained within it.

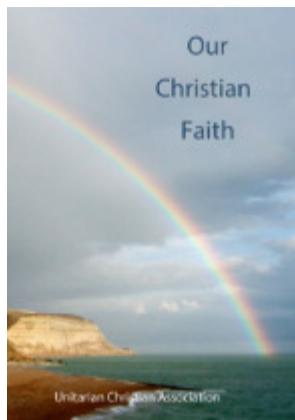
Enclosed with the joining pack was also a current, and some back copies of, **The Liberal Christian Herald**. The title indicates the breadth of this Association. As editor of the *Viewpoint* and past editor of the *Newsletter* I can only look with envy at the quality and professionalism of this publication. Good quality paper, print and in colour. I am certainly looking forward to receiving the next issue.

It has taken me even longer, over fifty years, to return to playing, or some might say scratching, the violin. The scratching is improving with practice, and a good tutor. The joy of playing has returned in a way I could never have imagined.

The moral of the above two decisions to return to that which has been important to me for what seems a lifetime is that you shouldn't put off those things in life which are special and give meaning to you. Yes, dip into something important and carefully, but don't dip for twenty-six or even fifty years, it is far too long. You might just miss the opportunities waiting out there, made especially for you.

1. *Our Christian Faith* by The Unitarian Christian Association.
Publisher Larkpress, April 2015

Joan Wilkinson



Introducing Janet Lythgoe

I have been given the task of writing a little about myself, by way of introduction. My name is Janet Lythgoe and I was born in Bolton but grew up in Birmingham. I now live back in Bolton where I have spent my career in teaching. Having semi-retired I enjoy researching my family history, singing in local choirs and playing the piano, alongside a small office job with Bolton Christian Community Cohesion.

In 2012 my choir was giving a performance during a service at a Unitarian chapel and the service caught my interest. I began attending the chapel and became a member in 2013. I now enjoy attending meetings and events there, I have been the minutes secretary for the Chapel Council, as well as for the Christians Together in Bolton Town Centre while our Minister was the chairman. I also enjoy reading in the services, which I do on a regular basis.

I belong to the local Unitarian Earth Spirit Network group as well as the National Unitarian Fellowship, in which I am at present at co-opted committee member. This year I have been chosen as one of the two delegates to attend the Unitarian General Assembly from our chapel. I am greatly looking forward to the experience, to participating in the activities and meeting people from other congregations, while learning how Unitarianism works as a national organisation, as well as meeting individual beliefs. I feel honored and privileged to have been given the chance to represent the chapel at this important event.

Janet Lythgoe

Secretary's Notes

Spring is in the air and the bulbs are popping up everywhere and I've got some very important news for you all.

The NUF AGM will be held this year during the GA Meetings in Birmingham Metropole Hotel Wednesday 12th April at 2:35 pm. The hotel forms part of the NEC complex and is very easily accessible from Junction 6 of the M42 motorway. If you are able to attend the meeting, you will be made most welcome. Our President Joan Wilkinson will chair the meeting and one of our International members from Sweden, Peter Zoné will give a short talk on how he found the NUF and became a Unitarian. I look forward to greeting all who manage to attend at either the NUF Stand or in the meeting itself.

One of the main topics that will be aired during the meeting will be the plan for the future. Every year the secretary and chair go on about the long-term future of the NUF and sadly, this year will be no exception. This year I'm pleased to report that our loss during the year was half the figure of the previous two years and that must give us good heart. However, it is still a loss and we need to move to a positive result if we are to maintain the NUF in the future. Currently the cost of subscriptions only covers the cost of producing our two publications with donation and bank interest, and we all know how little this is these days, helping to reduce our overall expenditure.

Those of you who have read the Accounts, which will accompany this report, will see that there is a debit in last year's figures of £250, our final payments to the 'Unitarian'. Without this for the coming year we stand a good chance of getting close to our break-even figure. Also, we plan to announce at the AGM a reduction in the number of publications we produce each year, not solely to reduce cost but to reduce the onus on our editors who are finding it increasingly difficult to find willing contributors as well as the time they need to compile the magazines in this very demanding world.

Let's hope that next year our Treasurer is able to report that we have broken even for the year and I can report a more positive message going forward.

John Wilkinson



Video Meditations for February and March **www.nufonline.org.uk**

As the NUF doesn't meet, it can be quite difficult to film a range of presenters for the Monthly Reflection spot on the website. However, the problem was overcome for the February Reflection, with Tony McNeile offering to use the facility on his computer, which allowed him to sit in his study and present directly to the screen, send the material to John Wilkinson, who added the opening and closing. I hope you will agree that this has worked very well. If there are members who would wish to follow Tony's example and have a go, please get in touch with me.

Reflection for February -St Brigid's Day – Tony McNeile

Brigid was a goddess from the Irish country tradition and she also became a saint of the Christian church. She is honored at the beginning of February, in a festival called Imbolc. This is a meditation for Brigid.

She comes out of the captivity of winter, Brigid, this goddess of purification and all things good. She touches the earth with her magic fire and warms it. The seed responds and starts to grow. She lays her hand on the ewe and the ewe knows her time is near and the lamb will be born wanting her milk. She waves her fiery wand in the air. The birds feel her warmth and it is time to find a mate and gather twigs and moss for a nest. And the young feel her warmth. Their hearts grow. The world seems more lovely. They look for love and to be loved and Brigid guides them and lets them see each other with desire and need. And the wise ones know that Brigid will not pass a cradle without pausing to leave a blessing on the child. And the wise ones know too that the skill they have in

their fingers to sew or paint, to craft and decorate, was passed by Brigid to their ancestors, generations before.

She is the goddess of healing and protector of the home and hearth. She travels in the worlds above and the worlds below. Brigid was the crone of winter, now she is the maiden of spring. She offers the future and asks you, 'What do you desire? Where is your life journey taking you?'

Look at yourself and whisper to the spring breeze, 'My ambition this year is to become, or is to do, or is cease doing'. Let us praise Brigid who comes in the spring, and lift our spirits up to life once more. Goddess of all time, maiden, wife, mother and crone. Walk beside us through the coming year.



Reflection for March – Celebrating Age – Joan Wilkinson

Whilst reading 'The Unitarian Life – Voices Past and Present', edited by Stephen Lingwood, I came across the following quotation from James Luther Adams, who lived from 1901 – 1994. James Luther Adams was perhaps the most influential theological thinker of Unitarian Universalism in twentieth century America. In the 1930s he studied in Germany, working with the underground church, which resisted Nazism.

In his 1986 book: *The Prophethood of All Believers* he wrote the following on growing old:

Each stage of individual development offers unique experience and opportunity. Certain experiences are possible only in youth – for example, the sense of the wide-openness of the future.

There comes a time, however, when the individual may say, “Nevermore.” Certain options – for example, career options – may no longer be open. Simone de Beauvoir at the age of fifty catalogues the things she will never do again: lie in the hay, slide on morning snow, win a first lover. But other experiences are possible only in fruited old age: the contemplation of satisfactions and beauties of long ago, the cherishing of old friendships, the exploration of opportunities previously unheeded (partly because of other importunate obligations), and also the meeting of the adversity of ill health (or of waning powers) with serenity and dignity.

In conjugal relationships, the love of the couple for each in middle life or in old age can possess unique qualities. To appreciate this uniqueness is something that requires thought and new sensitivity. A theology of ageing asserts, then, that each age group (and each person) has its own inimitable rendezvous with the coy mistress, the meaning of life.

These words written by James Luther Adams resonate deeply with me as I suspect they will with those who read or hear them. Whilst it is good to watch and celebrate all that is good in many of the youngsters we know, how sad to watch those who struggle through their childhood, adolescence and young adult life, where life’s meaning is in gang culture, rebellion and violence, or where life-chances have been lacking throughout their lives. May we support in prayer and action all that which goes some way to showing a better way, a way of more possibilities. Supporting the Send a Child to Hucklow is just one way we can help youngsters have sight of that which is positive and gives meaning to life, as well as supporting that which is being done locally.

Throughout my life, I hear the words echoing – ‘why don’t you learn to act your age’. Whilst acknowledging the limitations and opportunities of older age, as expressed in the words of James Luther Adams, each individual is encouraged to celebrate age in their own unique way. We are called to celebrate this great gift of

life by living it right through the years, sharing both joys, insights, hopes and concerns. It is through caring and sharing that individuals of all ages can explore and discover the meaning of their lives.

'The Unitarian Life', edited by Stephen Lingwood at £9.99 can be obtained from Essex Hall by telephoning your order with card payment to 020 7240 2384.

March Worship Service on www.nufonline.org.uk – Keeping a Balance

This service from Norwich is not recent but nevertheless is appropriate for March, when at the end, we celebrate the Spring Equinox. The service is taken by Rev Kate McKenna, who was at that time studying for the Ministry. Now Kate is the Minister at Bury. As well as this being a beautifully crafted service and time specific, the content, quantity and quality of music goes towards keeping all in balance.

Through March the February Reflection will be found in the website's archives with the March Monthly Reflection and Service being on the front page.

Worship Resources on the Internet

NUF members not able to join, or not wishing to join, a congregation and yet would appreciate a range of spiritual resource on the Internet, might well find the following links speaks to their needs. The following link, from the USA Unitarian Universalist Church of the Larger Fellowship, is a service specifically designed for those who are watching at home. On the Monday of each week a new service is available for the following seven days.

<https://www.questformeaning.org/worship/worship-archives/>

There is, of course, a wide range of material, both short and long, on www.ukunitarian.tv, which I hope many already find useful as well as the growing resources on our own website:

www.nufonline.org.uk .

The main GA website: www.unitarian.org.uk and congregational websites, many of which can be found on www.ukunitarians.org.uk offer a wide range of worship and other religious material.

Joan Wilkinson

Castle Donington Fellowship

Members appreciated being led in a creative writing exercise at their recent meeting. We were given a wide range of images of places and people, from which to choose and write a piece of prose, prayer or poetry. These images were paintings, photographs, cut-outs from magazines and anywhere else the workshop leader had managed to find images which would act as a trigger for the imagination. The handout instructed us to include a word from a selection of scientific terms and a foreign word regularly used by us. The first half of the evening was spent in doing no more than making rough notes of words and phrases, suggested by the image selected, sharing those rough notes with the group, before proceeding to write a more polished piece.

All the pieces written had potential but members felt they needed yet more polishing, whereas the following two required only minor tweaking. This is such an enjoyable exercise to try and I would recommend it to readers. If you find you enjoy trying to write creatively and feel pleased with the result, please send them into Mattie, our *Newsletter* Editor.

The first poem is by Pat Caddick, who chose as her image, a simple picture of a daughter with her arm around her mother.



Mother and Daughter

It seems a simple picture
But simple starts a journey
Beginning with my beginning
But ending with her ending.

Her descent was slow and sad
No more my rock and strength
But in need of love and patience
As she entered her dark night.

En-route her brain betrayed her
No memory of today
A black hole where once was reason
Yet love remained; sustained her

And so she quietly left me
Now her absence my dark hole.
Except for gifts of memories
Her restoring love and strength.

Pat Caddick

The second poem is by Liz Brownhill, who chose for her trigger, an image of the sea meeting the dark cliffs with just one single seagull flying high above the sea.

Each day

at dawn, let me be like the dark cliff:
an observer unperturbed by life's breaking waves,

in the morning, let me be like the gull:
a traveler negotiating its stationary state with the
moral breeze,

at midday, let me be like the surf:
a seeker trying, ad infinitum, to reach the truthful
ground,

and in the evening, let me be like the land:
a dreamer resting, considering the yet-to-be.

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Minister's Page

I present, 'it's the thought that counts' for our local radio station, Bolton Fm. I record five pieces that will go out morning and lunchtime over five days. On the Rota, I pop up with a week, every other month. It is a good challenge. Firstly, it is finding five things to talk about and then précis each one down to a ninety second broadcast. At the end of the recording session my producer will say 'Thank You' and books me to record five more in eight weeks' time. I assume she is satisfied. I do listen to Bolton Fm in my car because it is a good mix of music for someone of my era. They also talk to local people about local goings on and keep us up to date with weather and traffic. I can pick the station up beyond the borders of Bolton, even as far as Stockport. So, there are hundreds of thousands who could listen and tens of thousands who do. The station tells me that they have a large online listening audience, nostalgic Bolton ex pats all around the world.

The strange thing for me is that I have no idea how my 'Thoughts' are received. No one I know ever says they have heard one of them. No one in Tesco's says, 'I know that voice!' There is never an e mail from the producer asking me to come in and collect my fan mail!

So, I cast my bread on the waters.

When I lead a service in church, it is quite the opposite. I feel the connection with the congregation. We share in moments of laughter usually in the Children's Story. At times during the prayers I can feel the atmosphere and intensity of the moment. Afterwards people may say how the service felt to them. I have a feel for the togetherness of the congregation.

The NUF is rather like my radio audience. I write words not knowing if they will ever be read, or if they move our readers to rage or indifference.

One group I do know are my friends in the Book of Fellowship'. There are six of us. The 'book' is actually six letters. Each letter contains responses to what has been written in the other five, a

little about our home life and some thoughts on our personal faith or about faith in particular. I take my old letter out of the pile, write a new one and send the package on. So, I have five good friends I keep in touch with and know I can be honest with about my life. Often it is from their experiences that I draw strength and inspiration in my own daily life.

And there is another way. One of the ladies of the Women's League told me she has a different version of our Book of Fellowship. She has a number of distant Unitarian friends whom she exchanges letters with. They are like pen friends. What a good idea I thought, especially in this age of instant messaging and e mails. A letter means so much more and feels so personal. I know I feel touched when a family writes to me after a funeral acknowledging the service written for them. So, I thought, I wonder if any in my unseen audience would like to join a 'Pen Friend' circle. If you do send me a card briefly saying what your interests are and where you come from, and we will take it from there.

Blessings
Tony

Worship Page

Each month I write a new service to take on my travels which always begin at Park Lane Chapel, Ashton in Makerfield. I can't remember why now, but for February I chose one of the readings from the Bible. It was the story in John's Gospel about Jesus travelling north to Galilee which meant going through Samaria. He stops by what was known as Jacob's Well. When a woman comes to draw water from the well, he asks her to give him a drink. She asks how he could ask her when he could see she was a Samaritan and Jews had nothing to do with them. I wondered why I had never wondered why!

It all goes back to Moses coming off the mountain after his meeting with God. The family group of Jacob's son, Joseph, who came within that great Exodus from Egypt, believed that Moses had been told that when they reached the Promised Land and took possession of the area promised to Joseph, they should build a Temple on Mount Gerizim and worship there. The families of Judah said, 'No he didn't!' Eventually they built their

temple at Jerusalem. From this each had their own version of the first five books, the Pentateuch. And as wars and empires moved across the region, Samaria became a province to many of them. Cultures mixed there. It was prosperous. They were described as having houses made of ivory. They were tolerant and allowed other religions to practice alongside their own. After one of the 'exiles' when inhabitants were forcibly removed, other outsiders were moved in and there was intermarriage. From Jerusalem, the Samaritans were viewed as mixed race and in error about the teaching. They were as fundamentally different as some groups within faiths are today. Eventually in the time of the Maccabees, Samaria was overrun and their temple destroyed. It is said the people still worshipped in the ruins. So, that was why!

This part of that chapter is about inclusiveness but goes beyond that as he offers the woman a new spiritual religion which is neither 'of the mountain nor the Temple in Jerusalem'. She became a convert and is recognised in the Eastern Orthodox Church as a Saint. And why did he tell her she had had four husbands? I thought it could be about reincarnation and her at last being released from the cycle. There are more to these Bible stories than I ever learned in Sunday School.

Prayer

When we take time on our own to pray, let us think about the meaning of holiness. Let us consider it as a spiritual perfection. Where can it be found? Let us think of the places we know to be holy - whether they are buildings or places or people. Wonder if they have indeed been touched by that gift of spiritual perfection. Something that comes from beyond the normal and every day, even beyond what we see as good and adds this quality of holiness. We feel a reverence for the holy. It is incorruptible. When we try to change it, or use it for ourselves it simply disintegrates into empty nothingness. May we in our prayers consider the power of holy places whether they be cathedrals, caves or sacred wells. Let us imagine the energy of holiness and open hearts to embrace it and if we can reflect it with reverence into the world.

Tony McNeile

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