

National Unitarian Fellowship

Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarians
And Free Christian Churches

News & Views

Issue 2

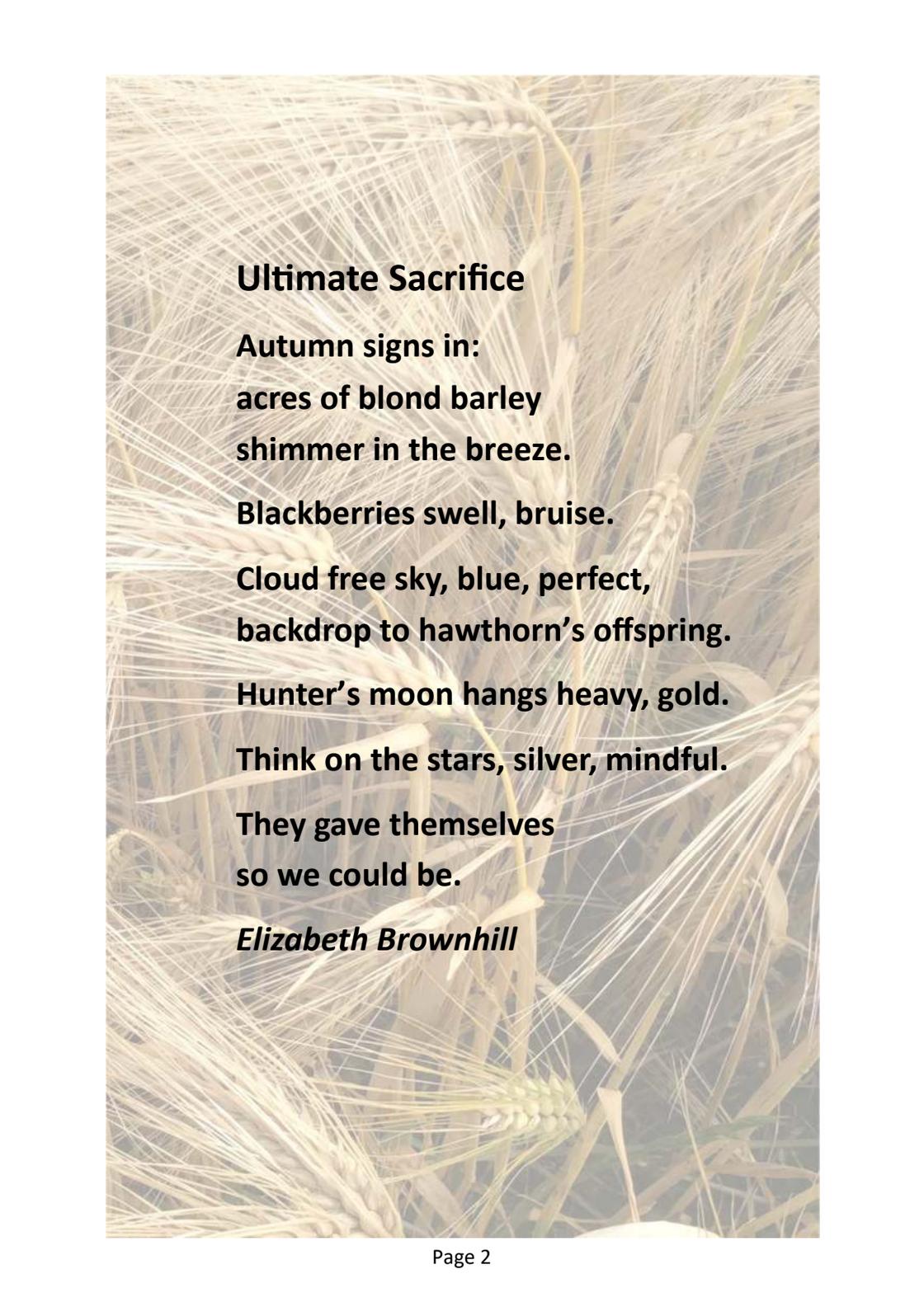


Autumn 2019



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

Registered Charity No. 1040294



Ultimate Sacrifice

**Autumn signs in:
acres of blond barley
shimmer in the breeze.**

Blackberries swell, bruise.

**Cloud free sky, blue, perfect,
backdrop to hawthorn's offspring.**

Hunter's moon hangs heavy, gold.

Think on the stars, silver, mindful.

**They gave themselves
so we could be.**

Elizabeth Brownhill

From your Editor

I apologize for the late delivery of the first edition of *News & Views* due to a problem at the printing stage. However, the delay was made up for by a better quality of paper and printing, which hopefully can be maintained. Normally computers make our lives easier but the last publication encountered a computer glitch, which took some time to fix.

In this edition there are our regular contributors but also some new ones, who I hope will continue to submit interesting articles both informative and moving as well as serve to encourage other readers to submit items. Thank you to all, who have written short or longer articles and poems. All are very welcome.

As a change to the usual material from our Minister Tony McNeile, he writes about the changes that have happened in the movement over the time he has been a Unitarian. This makes very interesting reading.

In the 'Views' section of *News and Views*, Sue Woolley examines Unitarians, the Arts and Creativity in the widest sense, to include ordinary activities which are creative and give meaning as well as what we would normally expect, when speaking about the 'Arts and Creativity'. Myrna Mitchell gives us a glimpse into her life and how her love of the Arts helps her to make some big decisions. In a short biography and poem, David Evans introduces himself to the readers. All have approached the theme for 'Views' very differently but equally interesting.

Items for submission to the Winter edition of *News and Views* should be sent to the editor by 15th November.

Joan Wilkinson

SECRETARY'S NOTES

I hope you have all spent a pleasant and relaxing summer. It goes by so very quickly, but, without our changing seasons, we wouldn't have the beautiful flowers and trees to admire and enjoy. I have spent a lot of time working in my garden this summer. Now I can sit back and enjoy the fruits of 'my' labours - although not totally mine, I have to admit. I have had help here and there!

When I have spent holidays in far-flung places, where gardens are nothing like ours, I know that I wouldn't swop our climate for theirs, even though they enjoy a warmer climate. Soon, our beautiful autumn colours will be appearing, which have a magnificence all of their own. I do hope you spend a pleasant autumn, enjoying all that nature has to offer.

Janet Lythgoe

Tony McNeile on Unitarians & Change

Unitarians, a community for what? That was the question I was asked to answer recently. The population of this country is over 60 million, the population of the Unitarians in this country is about 3,000. Do we make a difference? Have we made a difference? Will we make a difference?

It has to be powerful and significant for 3,000 to make a difference amongst 60 million.

But over the years the Unitarians have made a difference. In my own time I have seen how the Unitarians have changed. When I joined, the Unitarians were known for being willing to remarry people who had been divorced. We were unique in this, and for a long time we

brought happiness and fulfilment to many. Many of our existing members came to the Unitarians for a second marriage, and they stayed.

They stayed not simply out of gratitude but because they found something within our faith that appealed to them both spiritually and as a community.

And there was more than that. The first Unitarian chapel I attended was actually a spiritual home for most of my friends from the then Liberal Party and also the United Nations Association. It was home too to many from the civic society.

I couldn't quite work out what was the driving force. Were they driven to be community minded because they were Unitarians, or did that Chapel community just seem the natural home for such altruistic people?.

As society has caught up, the Unitarians lost their monopoly on re-marrying divorced couples. Weddings in places outside the church became the norm.

My nephew was married last year in a hotel in Leeds. We had the whole package, pre drinks, ceremony, meal, entertainment, all under one roof and we stayed the night. No religious content allowed of course. That is the law today. Weddings outside church cannot be spiritual unions as well.

How could the chapel compete with that? We are 3,000 Unitarians in a secular world.

When I joined the Unitarians, the worship was very much Christian based on, the fatherhood of God, humanity of Jesus and reason when reading the Bible. But that has drifted away. You only have to look at

the hymn books. The red hymn book has all the traditional Christian hymns. They have the fatherhood of God running through them like Blackpool in its rock.

Then there was competition from the degendered Green Hymns for Living, which seems more spiritual and earth centred but that too has given way to the Songs of Faith and Freedom, not even hymns, but songs, with modern spiritual words and tunes. You might think the Unitarians are escaping from their Christian roots.

It reminds me of the theme in a George Eliot novel. The hero is an individual and surges ahead of the normal rules of society - but in the end the crowd drag the hero back, but all have been changed by the experience. The crowd has moved a little way along the path of the hero.

Unitarian Christians do not want the Movement to drift away from its Christian roots. They have some growing congregations. But so do the Humanist Unitarians. The Unitarian Movement is becoming stretched. It could split but I hope it never does because all of its stretched length has a commonality which is essentially Unitarian.

The Unitarians have become a community that is focussed on human rights, particularly the rights of particular minority groups. Support of Gay Pride and registering our buildings for same sex marriages is the latest manifestation of that.

Just as with the remarrying of divorced people, this is not based on opportunism but on support for the right to love. It is support for spiritual freedom.

I suppose that has always been the way of Unitarians, support for spiritual freedom. One of the most significant of our special services is

the Flower Communion Service, which originated in Prague with the Rev Norbert Capek. He had a congregation that came from different faiths and different walks of life. He devised the flower communion service to suit everyone. A flower is the symbol of so much; of love, of condolence, of support, of friendship. In the offering and exchange of flowers, all faith and religious boundaries were superseded. Norbert Capek was arrested and sent to a concentration camp and there hanged by the Nazis. As well as uniting the community he served, he had also sheltered and moved Jewish people onto the escape trails from persecution.

Unitarian history begins with their own persecution, for being non-Trinitarians. In spite of being persecuted and excluded from so much of society, universities, civil service etc, they maintained their faith. Faith was more important, it was a principle of freedom. They would not cave in to make their own lives easier, or satisfy the norms of society at that time.

I wonder what would happen now if part of Brexit meant abolishing the Unitarian Movement? Who amongst us would be defiant and who would go for the easy life?

We have seen the Unitarians declining in numbers. From ten thousand to three thousand in no time at all. We could say it is because we are caught up in a secular age. Church attendance everywhere is in decline. We could say that we are not the only ones with a social conscience. There are large organisations working on a national scale working for social justice. Amnesty, Age Concern, Truffle Trust, Shelter, Oxfam, the Red Cross, Save The Children. We can only join them and support them. We are contributors but not leaders.

In the early days of my ministry we had a flower festival as part of our celebration for being around for 300 years. A local flower club did the main arrangements, but we also asked our own members to make an arrangement to honour any charities or organisations they supported or worked for.

It turned out that more than half the congregation were involved in one charity or another within the town. They didn't do it because they were Unitarians, they did it because it was something that mattered to them personally.

It was a good reason that they felt comfortable within the congregation. They were alongside like minded people.

One of the most truculent members of our congregation was always telling how she was a fifth generation Unitarian. She could be a real stumbling block to any proposed changes. I wondered about the value of tradition.

But we used to preach tradition. We preached the tradition of dissent, of being strong in the face of the mainstream. We preached the tradition of social service, of education for all, the rights of women, the 40 hr week, ending child labour, that all are created equal.

We preached the social tradition, I suppose, to boast about who we were but also to inspire. To inspire our congregations to carry the flag themselves as generations before had carried the Unitarian flag.

But there is another tradition. The religious tradition that keeps us meeting on Sundays in our chapels for worship, though we don't actually admit who or what we worship. Our tradition is based on the doctrine of no doctrine, of freedom to believe and interpret as your reason dictates.

I used to think that on a Sunday morning everyone was finding nourishment from the worship in their own way. Some were happy just to be there, to be meeting up with long established friends, happy just to belong. One lady used to say, she never listened to my sermon. When I walked to the pulpit she began counting, how many teas, how many coffees. Who needed buttonholing for what.

But for others, some found spiritual nourishment in the prayers, some in singing the hymns, for others the readings or even the address.

We were a congregation of individuals. We were held together by an invisible bond that no one was really able to describe. Even the truculent one was accepted.

Sometimes I think it is simply an energy that binds us together. It is spiritual. You can't define it. You could never say, we all believe this and not that, because we don't. You could never say we are united in our support of this cause or that cause, because we are not.

We are a Movement with a label that doesn't actually mean much to anyone but ourselves.

Unitarian? What's that ? Well, we are the non-trinitarian Christians though we are not all Christians, only some of us. We meet in beautiful chapels and we worship like Christians but our worship is not really Christian. It is a mixture of all sorts.

When I consider my own story, I see how much I have changed during my years as a Unitarian. I joined up as a traditional protestant Christian, Britannia rules the waves and Italian generals are useless fools. But the Unitarian type of worship I found began to unravel all that and I eventually lost the exclusive Christian label in favour of some-

thing universal.

I honour Christianity as a mystery religion. I see mystical goodness in Christianity as in all religions. I also see the evil in religions when they become controlled by a human organisation for its own power.

There is a spiritual dimension to life and it exists everywhere. If we can tune our own spirituality into the song of the universal spiritual dimension, we feel the power of it within ourselves and see it everywhere around us.

I have settled for saying that we Unitarians are a community for spiritual beings. We are for people who express spirituality in many different ways. For some it is the spirit of the small community, meeting and caring about one another, for others the inborn spirit of altruism that drives them to care for their fellow beings beyond the small chapel community, for some the spirit of the nature that opens their eyes and their souls to the whole wonder of the living earth, and for some it is the spirit of divinity, a feeling towards a divine presence manifesting itself in them and in the world.

We seek to offer a form of worship that all spiritual people find enriching. We are a community for the spiritual seekers as well as the spiritually awake. We offer the freedom of the spiritual journey to all who come to our door.

We may only be 3,000 but we are still strong enough to be a catalyst for change once we recognise what we are, and what our purpose is.

Unitarians, a community for the spiritual person. I would happily adopt the Hindu greeting, Namaste, 'The spirit in us greets the spirit in you, and welcomes you to our community'

Namaste. A community for spiritual people.

A Place of Testimony and a Centre of Learning. (for communities of all faiths and none)

Well, what an inspiring day. Our Castle Donington Fellowship visited the National Holocaust Centre and Museum near Newark following a scenic route through some stunning English countryside, (once we had left the Motorway).

On arrival, the Memorial Gardens still held their wonderful rose dappled scents on the breeze even though over 1000 white peace roses were now maturing into rose hips. We placed pebbles on the growing sculpture in remembrance of the 1.5 million children lost in the Holocaust.



So much to do and in a tight schedule as we had previously booked seats for a lunchtime presentation/testimony from Arek Hersh.

Our joint decision was to go on 'The Journey' as far as time allowed. So off we set to participate in the interactive experience of what Leo, a young Jewish boy witnessed in the 1930's, while living in a typical Jewish home, confronted and bullied at school by a racist teacher and from local Nazi thugs during Kristallnacht.

We had to cut our journey short, (we will be back), in order to find seats for the film preceding Arek Hersh's talk. The film was a harrowing account of his life as a young boy aged 11 - 14 and half, in the ghetto and concentration camps. This was followed by more verbal detail from Arek himself supported by his wife Jean and a question and answer session. In spite of the horrifying subject matter, this was conducted with dignity and some animation, and even a spot of hu-

mour. The seminal moment for me was when Arek Hersh raised his arm to display his camp number tattooed on his arm.

Giving attention to the wider picture, we reflected on the purpose of the Centre to promote an understanding of discrimination and prejudice and the development of ethical values, leading to a greater understanding within society.

The Centre uses the history of genocide as a model of how society can break down and emphasises how current and future generations must carefully examine and learn from these tragedies.

A meaningful experience for all of us and suitable for school parties, this National Centre is a hidden gem in the heart of the East Midlands.

Anne Griffin - Castle Donington Fellowship.

‘Nostalgia’ by Tony McNeile (NUF Reflection June 2019)

At the beginning of this month my brother and I went on a nostalgia tour to places that had once been part of our lives. Our grandparents had lived in an old brick cottage at the bottom of a Cheshire lane.

The lane was a mile long they used to tell us. We spent our childhood years visiting them and exploring the countryside all around. As teenagers we worked our summer holidays on the local farms

We wandered down it again. It is just over half a mile to where the house stood. The house has gone. Where it had stood the local farm had expanded and covered the area with huge industrial cattle rearing sheds. We looked for evidence of the old garden fence against the road, or maybe a surviving brick, but nothing.

Our history was now only in our minds. We retraced the journey up the lane towards the main road where we had gone to catch the once a day bus into the nearest town.

At least everything was in place along that quiet lane, the bridge where the railway line crossed, the section where the canal came close, the mini lakes we called pits where swans used to nest.

It really is a beautiful place, but as a child I don't think I really noticed how beautiful it was. Then it was normal, part of everyday living. Now though, it was special.

I noticed the silence. I noticed how green the trees were that overhung and bordered our lane. I noticed the rich green verges. I noticed the cows in a field beyond the canal. They were as still as if they were in a painting. On the distant horizon was the church spire, our next destination. We were in a beautiful silence, a tranquil one. The sun was shining on the tall trees and the air was lazily ruffling the dark green leaves. There was life in the hedgerows and along the canal bank. Life that was gentle and we were tuned into it.

We were walking a well-remembered road into a timeless now. It was, but was not, what we had remembered. In childhood we had run and skipped through this beauty. Our young lives had been more important than this tranquility around us

We moved on and eventually to that distant church and its graveyard. It had recently been strimmed and all the old gravestones were exposed. We searched for a family grave we hadn't seen for thirty years and couldn't find it. The picture was there in our minds, the white kerb-stones and the black writing but there was nothing on the ground. We trod carefully around the uneven plots trying to remember where exactly we had stood and watched all those years ago. It

was gone, it must have subsided into the eternity of the grass.

It was peaceful there too. Far from the noise of any traffic. In my poking around I disturbed a hare. I took it as a sign and anyway it was time to move back into our world of today.

I should have been sad at this loss of our history. I wasn't though. I felt enriched that I had been in the wonderful peace and tranquility that accompanied the walk along the lane and then the search in the graveyard. I felt the love becoming yet stronger for those now lying unknown below the turf.

How wonderful to have the memories of times past. How wonderful to find places where nature still lives peacefully and timelessly. How wonderful to have our eyes opened to the beauty of life and to feel that there is a power in life which can sometimes touch our spirits and lift them.

We at the National Unitarian Fellowship greet you and wish you peaceful moments in this month of June.

***'My Trip up Snowdon'* by Joan Wilkinson (NUF August Reflection)**

On our recent holiday in Wales we took a trip up Snowdon, in a carriage pulled by one of those small steam engines, the Snowdon Lily, the type so beloved by the Rev W Awdry. This narrow-gauge, rack and pinion rail trip of 4.7 miles gave a regular clickety-



clack, which added to the chuffing of the steam engine, becoming quite intense as we were pulled up the steep gradients of the mountain.

As I watched the walkers, almost lost in the vastness of the mountains, I realised that there are many of a certain age, like me, who come to the point in life of losing steam and need the help of others to achieve that which is out of their reach. How I appreciated all those volunteers who made it possible for me to go to the summit of Snowdon. How I appreciated being able to experience the exhilaration of the unfolding vistas as the train climbed higher. How I appreciated the joy of people walking and waving as we shared in the experience of Snowdon, remembering how good it was when I too walked up this mountain as a youngster. There is that heart stopping moment, when all seems right and good.

And yet – isn't there always the 'and yet' - the other side of the story? What about all those carbon- emissions from that much-loved little steam engine? The joy it gives the many hundreds of volunteers, and all those who support the resurgence of this thriving voluntary industry, cannot last into another generation without questioning itself, surely.

Having travelled to school on a steam train until I was fifteen, when steam engines were replaced by what seemed so commonplace, the diesel engine, there is always a sense of nostalgia now, when I ride on a steam train. However, life changes, and it is clear that now we must all shift our expectations of what we do in order to look after the planet we live on.

George Orwell wrote the following words about the coal industry in

the 1930s in *The Road to Wigan Pier*.

... all of us really owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground, blackened to the eyes, with their throats full of coal dust, driving their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel.

These words highlight the inhumane exploitation of both people and planet, which amongst other things fueled the age of the railway. The areas and types of exploitation may have changed but exploitation still remains. Where does the coal come from to fuel the little steam train that gave me such pleasure? The cycle of exploitation continues somewhere in the world, of both people and planet.

The appreciation I felt at the time, of my wonderful trip up Snowdon, still remains, but hopefully in the ongoing research, new discoveries and new developments will replace the power of nostalgia for steam and create an appreciation of new, cleaner and efficient ways of going up Snowdon, beyond the steam or diesel pulled train. New scientific and technological ways of transport and movement will bring about a new revolution, which heralds a time when people and planet can flourish, and exploitation come to an end.

Letter to the NUF

Dear Editor,

In his Minister's Page in NUF News & Views, Issue 1, Summer 2019, Tony McNeile pays limited tribute to the final Faith lecture in the recent series at Rawtenstall, before going on to express his disagreements with it.

Fair enough, we are all entitled to our opinions. But Tony then goes on to express a rather startling condemnation of Christianity. For him,

he says, it represents 'two thousand years of failure despite the Easter sacrifice'.

Really? Is this the faith that inspired (and sustained) Francis of Assisi, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, and on ... right up to 20th Century mystics like Evelyn Underhill and Thomas Merton? The faith of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Simone Weil, Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu and the Franciscan priest Richard Rohr? A failure? I'm saddened that a Unitarian minister could make such a sweeping (and prejudiced) statement. Aren't we the faith that sees value in all religions, that *celebrates* the many different faiths of the world? Would Tony make such a generalisation about Judaism, Islam or Hinduism, I wonder?

Of course, Tony McNeile does aim to give context to his opinion, but I can't say I'm impressed with the logic. He conflates the Christian tradition and its teachings with 'dogma' (imposed doctrine that stultifies) – and this makes for an easy dismissal of Christianity. Has he read Richard Rohr on dogma, for example?

Tony counterposes what he terms a 'national' religion with what he sees as a more fulfilling approach: namely, each person approaching their god individually in a 'vernal wood', or through immersing themselves in a sacred ritual. But all the spiritual teachers of Christianity, including the mystics – and teachers of other faiths too – teach that praying alone is vital to a living faith. It has always been part of the Christian tradition.

Tony's writings are often rewarding, but this is not the first time I've felt they've been marred by unjustified attacks such as this -- which I don't believe are fitting coming from a national faith chaplain. Tony admits he struggles with the Christianity he was brought up with, well many of us do, but things have moved on since our youth. Perhaps it's time we did too.

Yours sincerely,
Jim Corrigan

From the Editor: Readers interested in a discussion of Christianity for them in today's world may be interested in joining the NUF Internet Forum, where a discussion 'Rehabilitating Christianity' is taking place. Readers can register on the Forum from the front page of the NUF website: www.nufonline.org.uk Please keep the letters coming in response to the many articles and perspectives in 'News & Views'.

A view of Christianity

By Peter Brown

In my late teens I attended church and was baptised and confirmed into the Church of England. However, on one particular Easter Sunday I developed a sudden revulsion against the 'unbelievable' teachings of the church. I recall being particularly revolted by the thought that Jesus, once resurrected, would ask someone to stick their hand into his wounds! In fact, the episode as described still makes me feel revulsion.

Nevertheless, I still retained an abiding interest in just what it was at the basis of religious matters and of Christianity in particular. The way to pursue this was for me via Christian criticism. The outright condemnation of religion seemed of no use to me in trying to understand the core 'spring' of Christian belief. The most fatuous book I ever read on the subject was on 'Why Jesus never existed' since if one were that negative why bother to write about it; I then realised that it was because it was a nice pot boiler for a mainly church believing America.

Early on, in the 1960's good criticisms were rare and offered only a very limited scope to enlarge one's understanding. It was it seems to me chiefly in the 90's and to date that matters have accelerated as

good academic work became available to the general public. The internet has certainly helped since while works remain in academia one generally has to face the facts that many good books are going to be priced around £60-90 or even more. One aspect of the internet that was probably not really foreseen was that the publication of reviews, even such as those on Amazon, often provide enough information to convey the ideas suggested in a book and so can assist by rendering the purchase of the book unnecessary. Recent developments by American universities of putting some of their lecture series on-line has meant that a major part of up-to-date research and academic consensus is now available to all.

So, my current readings and thoughts are on what was actually taught by Jesus aside from the Messianic beliefs which spurred the early church and the Resurrection which confirmed their beliefs in a coming Messiah. Surprisingly there are many clues within the teachings which point to a scattered knowledge that is now only being borne out by modern studies. Just to mention one area of study and that is large number of 'clinical death' experiences referred to collectively as 'Near Death Experiences'. YouTube has very many accounts and the experiences and findings even with young children related there and in books seem to indicate common findings. These are that the overall 'power' in the universe is benevolent despite all experiences to the contrary; and that all people everywhere are somehow 'related,' even that we are all 'one'. On return to 'normal life' those who have experienced a NDE also feel and demonstrate a need to somehow 'do good' for others benefit. That to me is the most convincing illustration of a contact with that Power which Jesus described as a 'loving parent'.

Views

Unitarians, the Arts and Human Creativity

Sue Woolley

The Oxford Dictionary defines creativity as “The use of imagination or original ideas to create something; inventiveness.” This is something Unitarians are very good at, in my experience.

Famous Unitarian Creatives

Considering the relatively small size of the Unitarian denomination, I have had to include American Unitarians and Universalists in this list¹. Eminent Unitarian/UU authors include Louisa May Alcott (Little Women), Ray Bradbury (Fahrenheit 451), Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Herman Melville (Moby Dick), Beatrix Potter and Kurt Vonnegut (Slaughterhouse-Five). Unitarian/UU poets include e e cummings, Sylvia Plath and May Sarton. Then there were the Transcendentalists, who included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Theodore Parker and Henry David Thoreau.

Musical Unitarian/UU creatives include composer Bèla Bartók, Julia Ward Howe (Battle Hymn of the Republic) and Pete Seeger, folksinger and song-writer. Both Frank Lloyd Wright and Charles Bulfinch (The Capitol) were Unitarian architects and Charles W. Eliot was a landscape architect. To round off this distinguished list, Arthur Lismer was a Canadian painter, Christopher Reeve (Superman) was a UU actor, and Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web.



And this list doesn't include the many Unitarians and UUs who write about our theology and spirituality, or contribute the words and music of hymns to our worship.

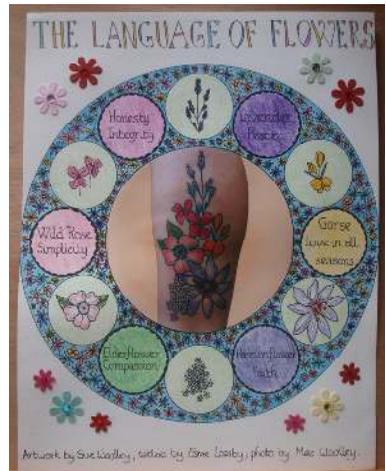
Blocks to Creativity

How many Unitarians, if asked, "Do you consider yourself to be creative?" would answer, "Ooh, no. I'm not very creative. I was hopeless at art at school."? Many of us, I believe, were discouraged at an early age from being creative either by disparaging remarks by thoughtless teachers, or by the soul-sapping practice of comparing our creations with other people's, and judging them inadequate.

I was one of them. I was labelled "no good at art" in my formative years. For me at that time, 'creativity' meant art, which meant drawing and painting, neither of which I had a particular talent for. So rather than feeling humiliated, I chose to withdraw from the field and concentrate on stuff I was good at. I retreated into more academic subjects, encouraging the life of the mind while neglecting my creative heart.

In my twenties, I discovered knitting and cross-stitch, both of which involved following a pattern and so 'didn't count' as creative. But of course, they were, all the time. I created garments and pictures and a small shoot of creativity started to grow in my heart.

Being creative, making something new and unique, which never existed before, is a brave and vulnerable process. Sharing our creations with others is a risky business, because we are laying ourselves open



to criticism. But being creative is so rewarding, because it feeds our hungry hearts, it nourishes our spiritual selves.

There are so many ways to be creative. 'The Arts' encompass all kinds of creativity, not just drawing and painting. Unitarians have found a cornucopia of different paths... many of which can be seen or experienced at Unitarian events, such as General Assembly meetings, society weekends, Summer School or FUSE.



Visual Arts

As well as the classic visual arts, drawing and painting, Unitarians have expressed their creativity in a variety of ways. Some produce beautiful collages, some do zen doodling, some create lino-printed cards and other items, or wonderful art journals, to name but a few. Every Unitarian poster is also an example of visual art. Others have used their cameras and their eye for a good picture and share wonderful photographs. There is even a Unitarian Facebook page called 'Photography as a spiritual practice'.

Crafts

I never cease to be amazed at the variety and high quality of craft items produced by Unitarians. One example being the wonderful pom-poms which adorn the front cover of this year's GA Annual Report, made by an innovative Unitarian from Norwich who also decorates trees with yarn.

Many of us knit, not just garments for family and friends, but also

scarves for the homeless. One year at Summer School, a community of knitters created a garden out of wool, which we presented to Sheila Jones at the end of the week. Another year we produced a rainbow blanket, made up of individual squares.

Some of us crochet, producing blankets, cushions, alternative poppies for Remembrance Sunday, and animals, among other things. Others of us use smaller needles, creating pictures from wool or embroidery silks. It was when I used graph paper to design a wedding sampler for my sister, that I first considered myself to be 'creative'. Some of us produce beautiful quilts, not only for bedspreads, but also for bags. I keep my current cross-stitch project in a beautiful quilted bag, which I won in the Summer School silent auction.

Unitarian banners and pulpit falls are a great example of creativity. Each one is different; each one is special; each one is beautiful. And each has been lovingly crafted by the members of the congregation or society concerned.

The Nightingale Centre sells a wonderful range of chalice jewellery, made of silver and gem stones, which adorn the necks, wrists and fingers of many Unitarians. One of their trustees is a talented wood-carver, who crafts delightful wooden chalices. And one of my proudest possessions is the copper chalice made for me by a member of Northampton Unitarians, when I was accepted for ministry training.

Cooking and baking may also be considered to be crafts. Many of us have enjoyed delicious cakes at Unitarian events. I am sure there are other crafts which Unitarians enjoy, which I haven't mentioned.

Music

Music plays an important role in Unitarian worship. We have many

talented hymn writers whose music and words grace our hymnbooks. The organists and pianists who accompany our worship with live music are also creators.

The Unitarian Music Society “seeks to foster high-quality music in Unitarian worship and to this end publishes a magazine, *Cantemus*, twice a year, and holds an annual weekend conference at the Nightingale Centre. The UMS has been instrumental in recording over 200 hymns from *Hymns for Living and Sing Your Faith* on CD, for use by congregations without an organist.”²

And singing meditation is a spiritual practice which has spread around the country, from its beginnings in Altrincham. Some congregations, notably Cross Street Chapel in Manchester, hold regular recitals of live music.

Other Physical Practices

I must not neglect to mention other physical practices, including dance, drama, walking meditation and labyrinth walking. Each of these is an act of creativity using the whole body to express our spirituality. These activities enable Unitarians to explore their faith in a more physical way.

Writing

Unitarians love expressing themselves in words, in writing. There are many different outlets for this talent in our communities. We not only write books (both non-fiction and fiction) but also poetry, magazine articles, pamphlets, blogs and websites. Every book, poem, article, pamphlet, blogpost or website page is an example of Unitarian creativity. The author of each one has put pen to paper (or, more likely, fingers to keyboard) and sent their words out into the world.

Worship

Every single worship service in a Unitarian church, chapel or meeting house is the result of an act of creativity by the worship leader. Even if they use the words of others for their chalice lighting words, prayers, opening and closing words and readings, they have still put these together in a particular way, to share a particular message. Each address has been written from scratch by the worship leader, sharing what is on their minds and in their hearts. And that is creativity. Many worship leaders write their own worship material too, because the words of others don't quite fit what they want to say.

Unitarian worship leaders also create more innovative services, whether they are flower communions, water communions, or rituals to mark the many festivals which Unitarians choose to mark, during the year. These may include the eight festivals of the Pagan Wheel of the Year, the Christian festivals of Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Harvest, Advent and Christmas, or festivals from other faith traditions. We also mark particular days, for example Holocaust Memorial Day, Earth Day, One World Week and Remembrance Sunday. Each of these may result in an unique service, crafted from the mind and heart of the individual worship leader.

And of course the other creative aspect of worship services is how the words and rituals are received in the minds and hearts of the congregation. Each of us brings our whole selves to the act of worship, and the effect of a particular worship service will vary according to the receptivity (or otherwise) of the individual in the pew. Unitarian worship leaders are taught to be sensitive to this, and to remember that in every congregation there will be someone who is full of joy and gratitude, someone who is angry, someone who is grieving, someone

who is lost, and we somehow need to include something to nourish them all. It can be quite a tall order!

How being creative feeds our souls



I said earlier that being creative is so rewarding, because it feeds our hungry hearts, it nourishes our spiritual selves. When we are creating something, we use our whole selves, not just our minds, but also our souls and our bodies. Being creative involves letting go of the fear of being judged, of having our work compared to that of others, and doing it anyway.

Perhaps it is how we create, as well as what we create, that is important. When I am writing or creating a worship service or stitching or crocheting or playing the piano, I try to be mindful, present, concentrating on the task in hand. It puts me into a different space. I'm not just knocking out a blogpost to get it out there; I try to put my heart and soul into the writing.

Attendance at Unitarian events provides many opportunities for Unitarians to feed their creative souls. At Summer School, for example, writing and various kinds of art and crafts are offered as part of the rich, multi-faceted Summer School experience. This can often break us out of our comfort zones and break through any creative blocks we might have.

When Joan Wilkinson commissioned this article, one of the comments she made was, "It would be good to see if there is a connec-

tion between your own creativity and how being a Unitarian shapes that – if at all.” The answer to that is that knowing Unitarians and interacting with them at places like Summer School has introduced me to creative practices I would never have known otherwise. Gillian Peel taught me to zen-doodle, she and Celia Cartwright taught me to crochet, and Gillian also helped me to understand that we are all creative. When I was doing the Worship Studies Course, the tutors – Alex Bradley, Ernest Baker and Vernon Marshall – helped me learn how to craft decent worship services. I owe them all a debt of gratitude.

Being creative, being able to express myself through words, ink, wool, threads and music, has enriched my life. It has made me a more rounded person, less left-brain dominant. I would say that it has also made me more spiritual, more open to the myriad ways in which the divine is present in our world.

Why not give it a try? The only limit is your own imagination. Which is no limit at all.

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Unitarians,_Universalists,_and_Unitarian_Universalists)

List_of_Unitarians,_Universalists,_and_Unitarian_Universalists

2 GA Directory 2018 - 2019

Stepping Out in Trust **by Myrna Michell**

When we sense a turning point in our life, it becomes difficult to explain the path of thought, to ourselves or to others. We don't *know* what will happen, so we move ahead step by step and test it out. That's how I see it anyway. At a certain point, given enough inner peace and space, we can see a potential overall picture, yet within it there will be doors which open and those which close. The finer details can't be worked out until they are in front of us, and sometimes

even the 'big picture' changes.

I've been in New Zealand since New Year 2014 and I shall be returning to live in the UK within days! This was a sojourn of over five years to get to know my grandchildren whilst they are young. Since 2014, within my sphere of action which here is mainly musical, I've joined (and left) several musical and theatre-groups. The only consistent activity has been the formation and leadership of a public choir – the only one in the district. I decided it was for everyone – no audition – and with a very broad content of songs. Being new to a country and town, how would I know what suits?

Ongoing leadership of a choir was a learning experience, but to my delight, the atmosphere became vibrant: members bring lunch plates for a long 'after-choir time'! However, when you are never quite settled in your new country, and the overall musical scene is highly frustrating; where the nearest Unitarian circle is 90 minutes' fast drive away, and somewhat introverted, then something has to change. I gave notice to the choir in mid-2018 and at the end of 2018 a good friend of mine took it on. Identity questions then poked their heads out. My thoughts were "well, I've stopped almost everything, so now can I start the process of going home? And in the meantime, what shall I do?"

One night in December, waiting to sleep, I could see potential 'steps' to several short songs. I started mapping them out in my mind and then didn't sleep till 3am....!

The next morning, I dusted off my muzzy brain and reminded myself of the steps. Over the next few weeks, I created a folder of twenty dances *which can also be sung*, and so I started advertising a series of simple circle-dances, having only ever led one-off dances prior to that. ALL DANCING (note the deliberate spelling error) was a trial 6-week course at a local venue. Fifteen people signed up but only half a dozen wished to continue it, and six is not a circle!

Differences in culture are subtle. Maybe local folk are more accustomed to Maori kapa haka, and as they love American country music,

there's also line-dancing. I hoped there would be a wish for the subtlety of graceful and reflective movement – but many kiwis are less keen to hold hands in a circle perhaps!

Dancing is so much more than 'exercise', so it should be wanted: It combines gentle exercise, spatial awareness, brain re-connections, connection with others, and brings joy. It's clearly something which is ok in Britain and amongst UUs, but not in this NZ town. In a few NZ cities where the population is more cosmopolitan, there are a few people leading Dances of Universal Peace. My single experience of this was in the UK and I was badly affected by the pushy leader and there was little explanation of what the moves signified. I gather not all are like him! However, from dance to dance, it seemed we quickly switched from one culture and language to another. I saw it as 'pick and mix.' The grass is not always greener in a new faith or cultural climate: rather, the riches are also deeply within ourselves. Can someone add something to these thoughts and modify my views please?

So back to ALL DANCING. Something creative arose and gave me joy: I had to move and 'step to my own drum'. It's all part of encouraging others as well as myself. One doesn't work without the other. Though I'd love to step out with those who are still young and lithe, my town has a high proportion of seniors! So, I must 'gid-over-et' (in English: 'get over it!'). Context dictates. If the younger folks aren't around, I move at the pace that I find.

We are familiar with the thought that the journey is as rich as the end-result. I felt enlivened by what I created: the process has added something to *me*, even if it didn't gather a crowd! I'll take my singing and dancing self, back into the UK Unitarian context!

Well, it's a plan anyway....one step at a time.



Photograph by Lourdes Morais

Minas Gerais, Brazil

Dennis Evans FRSA poet, writer & teacher

Dennis Evans, a member of the Golders Green Unitarians, is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, with his poetry published in the UK and abroad. Eight collections of his poetry have been published by Celebration Press, including 'Service days', based on his time in the National Service.

His public readings include; London literary festivals, Edinburgh Fringe, Poetry Society and North East Brazil (for the street children). Dennis has travelled world-wide, and his work has been translated into many languages. His poems have been set to music for both singing and for dancing.

For many years he worked as a poetry publisher and designer as well as writing for: The Guardian, The Central Office of Information and provided poems for 'Talking books for the blind'. He was RSA Mentor for the community involved with the Notting Hill Festival Children's march.

Dennis continues to use his talents as a poet and his lifetime of experience and creativity, serving the community. You can learn more about his work at <http://www.poetrypf.co.uk/dennisevanspage.shtml> or contact him directly if you would like to learn more: dennis@poetry1.plus.com .

This edition of *News & Views*, ends with a poem written by Dennis entitled: *A time of roses*.



A time of roses

I am in the harebell,
and the hawthorn.

I am in the devil's-bit
and yellow coltsfoot.

I am in the blue,
the blue of the footpath geranium.

I am in the landscape;
a time of roses.

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