

# National Unitarian Fellowship

*Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarians  
And Free Christian Churches*

## News & Views

Issue 8



Spring 2021



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

Registered Charity No. 1040294

## Spring poem 1

stand-in flowers

like alert ears of hare,  
pens were planted in vain;  
no words to bloom  
from beyond the grave;  
no buds to hint at syllables to come.

Sylvia,  
named for the forest,  
pushed a pen over paper,  
journeying into humanity's deepest recesses.

like her forest fruits,  
her poems shouldered themselves  
out of darkness  
into the light  
of day,  
of knowledge.

*(Several years' ago I visited Sylvia Plath's grave at Heptonstall, West Yorkshire.*

*Two biros were among floral memorials on her grave.*

*The third stanza refers to her poem 'Mushrooms'.)*



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## **OLD YEAR – NEW YEAR**

2020 – let it go.

Cut the strings and let it drift away into the ether.

Leave it to find its way deep into the darkness  
where it will eventually take its place alongside the other years  
that have gone before it.

It will find a place in the history books. Sadly  
the main event for which this year will be remembered  
will not make good reading.

So what of 2021?

When the time comes to cut the strings and let this year go,  
what will the history books say of it?

Will we have made it

a fairer one;

a healthier one;

a greener, more environmentally friendly one;

a kinder and more loving one?

I'll do my best where I can. Will you?

You see, a lot of how it is remembered will be down to us.

*Bernice Lashbrook*

### **Copyright Notice**

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## Editorial

A belated Happy New Year to all our readers and welcome to the Spring issue of *News & Views*. It has not been an easy start to the year as the third wave of the coronavirus has continued with renewed ferocity. However, as the rollout of vaccines continues at an amazing rate, there are more hopeful signs of things to come. While the new normal, whatever that may be, is still a considerable way off, the new growth that Spring brings reminds us of the need to be positive, and of the new opportunities that cataclysmic events can bring.

So our theme for this issue is “New Beginnings”. This runs through our Minister’s Page and Video Reflection. It is exemplified by the development of the NUF website and new opportunities for social contact via Zoom and Facebook. We will welcome new faces on the Executive Committee from 1 April. Our International contribution is the Seven Principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association, which offer one attempt to set out some essential values which some, perhaps many, of us will find useful “waymarks” for our future direction. Our Views contributions offer two slightly different responses to the opportunities new technology presents for the Fellowship. As always, comments on these pieces and on anything else in the magazine will be welcome.

However, these opportunities are only possible because of the commitment of NUF members and leaders over the years. It is timely for us to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the NUF (strictly speaking this was in 2020 but celebrations were overwhelmed by the pandemic.) Joan Wilkinson tells us of her updating of the Introduction to the NUF which is on the website and traces the history of the Fellowship. In particular we remember with gratitude the work of the late Dorothy Archer, member, President and tireless

worker for the NUF over many years. Her generous bequest is making possible the Dorothy Archer Memorial Prizes which are described in this issue.

Finally, we thank NUF members for their continuing readiness to contribute to the magazine. Lockdown seems to have given many of you more time to write poetry and to read – we have a good crop of poems and book reviews this time. Please keep them coming! The theme for the Summer issue will be Resolution and Perseverance. The deadline for contributions will be 15 May.

Meanwhile, enjoy the Spring and stay safe.

*Nick Saunders*

## **Minister's Page**

Faith, Reason and Tolerance, these three but the greatest of these is Reason. Reason is the bedrock on which the Unitarian faith stands but it is also the millstone round its neck. Reason undermines faith and shatters belief. Long ago reason built up our congregations and now reason is emptying them. Churches close and congregations diminish because reason has said there is no God in the sky and there was no man sent from God with supernatural powers to heal and perform miracles, only a human rabbi teaching the ancient wisdom of all religions. Reason is for the world, to see through falseness and hypocrisy to find the truth. Reason is for picking over the faults and misconceptions in our own lives.

Reason is not for worship. When we come to worship we should kick off the shoes of reason and walk barefoot into the wonder and mystery of the hidden life of the soul. The soul has a link within the super-

natural, honed on the mythologies and fairy tales from the dawn of time. In worship we release the soul from the constraints of reason and rejoice in the love of life and one another.

Whether you worship alone or in the company of others, the heart wells up with love for this world we live in. The sky and the trees seem more beautiful, the ocean translucent. The hills and lakes open our eyes to a higher world. You stand with eyes and arms wide open to embrace the whole majestic scene.

In the communion of a Chapel the heart exalts on the poetry of words in familiar stories, rejoices in the music that resonates deeply in the body and sends the imagination soaring on high registers. Worship is a dramatic fantasy from which nourishing truth is distilled. Procession and the familiar of ritual are symbols that bind us to this spiritual world. Chapel worship is only for an hour and when it is over we return to our world enriched in the deep within that reason can neither enter nor explain.

*Tony McNeile*

## **Prayer**

Rejoice, rejoice! Spring is near. The snowdrop is ready to open, the ewe is ready to lamb, the soil is warm, the birds are building nests. Give thanks for the turning world and its rhythm of life. Let it be a symbol of light in this uncertain Covid world. Let it reassure us that there will be an end to lockdown life and we should look at the horizon with hope. Let the growing strength of the sun and the longer day of light comfort us. Pray for the well-being of our families and friends and keep in touch with them. Give them strength and welcome the strength they give us. Amen.

## NUF Monthly Reflection February 2021

Welcome to the National Unitarian Fellowship and this meditation for the month of February.

How do you see February? It is not quite the continuation of winter. We step out of our winter house as the light gets better and sometimes hurriedly step back in when cold and snow return the winter. It may still be cold, there may still be frost and even snow but beneath it the spirit of life is stirring. February is the very beginning of Spring. Seeds in the soil start to germinate. The ewe in the field is preparing for the birth of her lamb. Birds are singing for mates and preparing to build the nest. The clock of life knows it is time to leave dormant winter behind.

February is a month for festivals. It begins with St. Brigid and Candlemas, moves on to Valentine's Day and then on to Shrove Tuesday. Brigid comes from Gaelic folklore and she also became adopted by the Catholic Church and declared a Saint. She is the Celtic mother spirit who visits every home on the first night of February and blesses every child. She is the patron of healing, poetry and the arts. She shares her day with the Christian Festival of the Purification and presentation of Jesus at the Temple.

February is another time for change. We prepared for winter, now we must prepare for Spring, with its sense of new beginning and new growth. Some Christian traditions wait for this festival to take down those Christmas decorations. Not everyone takes them down on twelfth night. How can we prepare for Spring? Maybe it is enough just to venture outside and look at it. See the snowdrops opening, see the green shoots bursting through the soil and the buds forming on the



hedges and trees. Find a few moments just to go outside and stand in the fresh air, breath it in, relax and just take it all in. Discover if you feel the energy yourself. Discover if you feel your own spirit being lifted and lightened by this energy of growth.

Being in tune with nature can create deeper harmony within our own spirits. With it comes a sense of deep love within. Whatever troubles we might face, whatever dark memories may be crowding in, they can be purified and dealt with by the energy we can absorb from Spring. The energy from Spring is the energy of love and the promise of better things to come. In February the bad memories can be dumped and the good memories given pride of place to be turned over and enjoyed time and time again. It is so easy just to bump along with life, sometimes feeling overwhelmed by the world with its tragedies, its politics and its lockdowns. Bumping along on the bottom can lead to anger against life and the world. The head spins with thoughts about things that we cannot change and these thoughts suppress all others.

We can escape from this cycle of impotent raging by simply deciding to purify our minds of all those thoughts and rise above them into clean air and switch our minds to nobler thoughts, like taking in the energy of spring and thinking about the positives in our lives, families, friends and plans. The important world is the world around us, the world we can influence by our own speech and actions, which is the circle we live in. Negative vibrations can trigger negative thoughts all around us and drag people down into the angry world where their spirits are muffled. If we can create a feeling of goodwill in ourselves it radiates from us with positive vibrations to others, making them feel positive and happy. They take it into their circles and so there is a ripple effect and a feel good factor grows.

So let us welcome February, step out into spring time, let it lift our spirits and turn our thoughts to new beginnings and new hopes.

*Tony McNeile, minister to the National Unitarian Fellowship.*

## **Redesign of the NUF website - update**

The new NUF website is being built by Limelight Web Design. We have a small group from the NUF committee who are seeing the project through. Our brief to Limelight (which is a small independent company) was to present an attractive first page, with menus that lead to further content. We envisage that the website will serve:

- *NUF members*, giving them access to News and Views and the Forum;
- as a portal to *other Unitarian Societies*, where they can leave notices of events etc; and
- as a starting point for *internet surfers* who are interested in spirituality, Unitarian worship and finding a friendly community of like minded people.

We have encouraged Limelight to use their artistic licence and design experience in developing the site to appeal to both existing and potential users. At the same time we are reviewing and editing some of the existing wording of 'primary' pages which will be transferred to the new site.

The plan is first to develop the site for desktop computers and then to launch a mobile phone version. Most searches are made on mobile phones and tablets but the presentation differs depending on which you use. The deal is to pay for the site to be developed and then to have a maintenance contract for at least a year.

There will be a further update in the Summer issue of *News & Views*.

*Tony McNeile*

## Looking Back and New Beginnings

2020 was the 75th Anniversary of the NUF. This seemed a good point at which to up-date our archived history. The first 50 years was thoroughly researched and written by Unitarian historian, Alan Ruston, long-term member of the NUF. This proved to be such an excellent welcome for enquirers and new members to the NUF that it has been kept up-dated, with the Introduction now covering the first 75 years of our history. See [https://www.nufonline.org.uk/NUF2015/introduction.htm#latest\\_update](https://www.nufonline.org.uk/NUF2015/introduction.htm#latest_update)

It has been enlightening on returning to read the origins of the NUF to learn what key figures in 1945 put in place in the light of all which has followed. Whilst methods of reaching out to our members may have changed, the original aims of those first Unitarians have not. Those first visionary NUF Unitarians saw a key role by which more people could be reached and connected across the UK. However, they could not have imagined the opportunities that the Internet would offer, or the numbers of members needed to reach and connect with even more people at the same time as to serve present members and maintain the Fellowship's resources. This has probably been the biggest challenge facing the Fellowship over the past 25 years.

Our 75th year has been a significant one for the NUF, bringing both good and bad. Whilst no one can have felt anything other than a great sadness for the pain and anguish caused by the COVID pandemic, it has meant more Unitarians connecting with each other through the Zoom medium as they have had to cope with restrictions on their freedom to go out safely and join with friends and family. As COVID began to spread, Zoom has made it possible to see and talk to friends, work from home, provide worship material, sing together,

and hold NUF Committee Meetings face to face (albeit via a screen). NUF members have been able to connect so much more with the wider Unitarian family, to connect as a membership together and to promote the value of what we as a Fellowship and Unitarians might offer.

Our 75th year has also found others interested in moving the NUF forward, bringing fresh ideas and enthusiasm. A great deal of planning has been taking place. This planning includes not only producing material for those not in a position to access Zoom but also to develop our key publication *News & Views*, which will keep the membership updated on what the NUF is trying to do across all mediums and through present resources. Already developments in content and presentation have begun. The aim to work with others across the movement is also reflected in this, our key publication.

The NUF website has needed an upgrade, both stylistically and technically, and this is already work in progress with a new team, who bring their skills to this crucial task, whilst retaining all the material that has been built up since the NUF website was first launched in 1998.

As our 75th Anniversary year came to a close, the NUF received a gift in the form of a very generous legacy from past President, supporter and long-term volunteer, Dorothy Archer. During her lifetime she gave so much time and energy, but nothing would give her greater pleasure than to know that her gift will enable the Fellowship to make this a new beginning, building on the foundation of what was begun in 1945 and which has continued up to the present. From this new beginning we hope that others will feel encouraged to come forward to help the present group of organizers and volunteers achieve their vision for the future. We would also encourage those who appreciate

reading material produced by the NUF, either in the regularly distributed publication or on the Internet to become members. An application form can be found on the back cover or [https://](https://www.nufonline.org.uk/NUF2015/pdfs/NUFsubscriptionform2021.pdf)

[www.nufonline.org.uk/NUF2015/pdfs/NUFsubscriptionform2021.pdf](https://www.nufonline.org.uk/NUF2015/pdfs/NUFsubscriptionform2021.pdf)

*Joan Wilkinson*

## **FACEBOOK NEWS**

This past year has seen a blossoming of Unitarians using Zoom and Facebook. Ministers and worship leaders from around the UK now reach out to us all in our homes. They are increasingly using the National Unitarian Facebook page, enabling us to watch them on Facebook or give information allowing us to join them on Zoom.

You can now watch or join the Altrincham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Brixton and Plymouth congregations for a wide range of activities, including story-telling, poetry, services of worship, and short reflections/meditations from Mark Hutchinson of the Cotswold Group. Sue Woolley continues to offer short, thoughtfully written reflections, on her regular blogspot 'Still I am One'.

We would encourage other worship leaders, poets, writers, filmmakers and photographers to join the National Unitarian Fellowship on Facebook to give details of when and how to join their zoom group. We would also like to continue building up a range of written and filmed/zoomed material, to be read or watched by anyone who can't meet in person and by those who prefer to get to know Unitarians from around the UK without leaving their armchair.

*Joan Wilkinson*

*PS - The new GA website is now available on [www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk).*

## **Appointments to the NUF Executive Committee**

Nominations for the following vacancies on the Committee were received by the closing date of 15 February:

Secretary – Indra Sikdar

Treasurer – None

Ordinary member – Monika Strell

Accordingly Indra Sikdar and Monika Strell have been duly appointed to the Committee from 1 April 2021 without the need for an election. Pen portraits of our new Committee members will appear in the Summer issue.

The Committee would welcome offers from members to take on the role of Treasurer ( see Money Matters later in this issue.)

*Nick Saunders, Returning Officer*

## **What's On**

### **Religions from around the world**

The NUF are having a short season of talks, on Zoom, once a month, on Exploring world religions. We start on Monday April 19th at 7.00pm with a talk by Anand Ennis Cole from the Shiva Trust - a Buddhist group who have a base in the Rossendale Valley of Lancashire. They often collaborate with the Unitarians of the Rawtenstall Community Centre.

The session will be presented by Indra Sikdar and Tony McNeile.

There will be opportunities for Q and A and discussion.

Topic: NUF World Religions

Time: Apr 19, 2021 07:00 PM London

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89039283455?  
pwd=VThUKzVZb25nR1VSakordkdPdmVCUT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89039283455?pwd=VThUKzVZb25nR1VSakordkdPdmVCUT09)

Meeting ID: 890 3928 3455

Passcode: 158631

Tony McNeile

07769895396

## **Uni-Sing! and Voices in the Air.**

Myrna Michell and Louise Rogers, who love to sing, and love to explore music as a spiritual practice, started online hymn-singing sessions in June 2020, singing hymns from the Green and Purple books. Called Uni-Sing! these sessions have continued each Saturday afternoon at 3.00 via Zoom. You are very welcome to join us.

This year they are starting Monday evening sessions, *Voices in the Air*:

[www.ring-of-voices.net](http://www.ring-of-voices.net)

These are again open-access and free for attendees. There are two different types of sessions -

- (1) singing a variety of aspirational songs; and
- (2) learning a bit about how to use music and some more technical aspects of singing.

To find out more please contact Louise on

[louise.rogers256@gmail.com](mailto:louise.rogers256@gmail.com).

## **NUF Zoom chats**

Don't forget you can meet up on NUF Zoom for a chat, talk about your latest book or recipe, or the weather where you are. Details below.

Wednesday NUF Zoom 7.30 - 8.00 pm

Meeting No. 816 459 26931 password 591570

Thursday NUF Zoom 3 - 4pm

Meeting No. 873 633 09674 password 591570

Tony McNeile

07769895396

*If you are new to Zoom and are having problems accessing it Indra Sikdar will be pleased to help.*

Tel. 07952 569097

e mail [isikdar@aol.com](mailto:isikdar@aol.com)

## **Money matters**

### **Treasurer vacancy**

Ken Smith, our Treasurer, is retiring and we are looking for a successor who would work with our newly appointed book-keeper. If you are interested, please contact me. We are most grateful for all Ken's work over the years.

Tony McNeile

07769895396



## **Payment of subscriptions**

Have you paid your subscription for 2021? Subscriptions (£13, £5 for students) were due on 1 January. Members who have not paid their subscriptions by mid-May will not receive future copies of News & Views until they have done so. If you have a query please contact our Membership Secretaries.

Joan & John Wilkinson  
membership@nufonline.org.uk

## **GA ANNUAL MEETINGS 2021 – MESSAGE FROM ESSEX HALL FROM THE GA WEBSITE**

I'm sure it will not come as a big surprise to most of you to learn that we have had to cancel this year's GA Annual Meetings in Birmingham for safety reasons.

However we do still want/need to have the business meeting, and we will therefore be looking to do this online. We are going to do the business over a single day, and have decided on **Saturday 24 April**, to allow easier attendance for working people.

### **So what will this involve?**

Well, we're still working on it, but broadly we're looking to do about four hours of 'business' split across multiple sessions with breaks in between, on Zoom. Voting on motions will take place online through a different programme.

## **Do I need to register and how much will it cost?**

Yes you need to register, though it'll be free. We'll be putting online registration up nearer the time. Everyone will need to register in advance **by 03 April**. As with the normal meetings, we will need to check voting eligibility and create voter lists, but will also then need to send login details to those people in advance to allow them to vote, as well as making papers available.

## **What about all the other events that make up the Annual Meetings?**

We are currently looking to run a separate worship service, a little like the Anniversary Service, at a different time. This will also be via Zoom, but won't require pre-registration.

On the 24<sup>th</sup>, we will not be running the usual Affiliated Society events, or our own training sessions, workshops or lectures. We are intending to run a number of such events over several months instead. These will also be on Zoom. Some of the Affiliated Societies will also likely run their own events online. We'll advertise these through Uni-News and on the Events page on the GA website.

[For the 2021 general information sheet, the Formal Notice of Meeting and Guidelines For Submitting a Motion see <https://unitariansmda.org.uk/2021-annual-ga-meeting>]

Other documents, such as the Agenda, Standing Orders, Annual Report (when available in March) and any general reports will be made available through our website in due course.

Regards,

*The GA Staff Team*

## Dorothy Archer Memorial Prizes

The Executive Committee are pleased to confirm that they have agreed to establish these prizes, which have been made possible by the generosity of the late Dorothy Archer, member, President and supporter of the NUF for many years. Prizes will be awarded in the following categories:



- Best article by a ministry student or worship leader
- Best poem or prayer (separate prizes for under 18s and adults)
- Best visual image (separate prizes for under 18s and adults)
- Best short story

The Committee are working on the details of the prizes in consultation with the GA Youth Officer and Unitarian College. We expect to announce details of the first competition in the Summer issue of News & Views, the NUF website and the usual Unitarian information channels.

*Nick Saunders and Joan Wilkinson*

### **NUF Book Discussion Group – Interim Report**

Toward the latter part of 2020 I received an invitation from Joan Wilkinson asking me if I would like to take part in a Unitarian Book Discussion Group via Zoom. The book we would be discussing was *Life Spirit* by David Usher (Lindsey Press, 2015).

I was intrigued, as the concept sounded interesting and it was an opportunity to read, learn, share experiences, listen and contribute. I offered Joan the opportunity to use my Professional Zoom account

as it allowed for discussion over 40 minutes without interruption. (The NUF has now taken out a Professional Zoom Account, which it shares with the Earth Spirit Network and Findhorn Unitarian Network.)

At first there were six of us, although one member had to drop out for personal reasons. It was agreed at the first meeting that the group's membership and discussions would be kept confidential to group members unless unanimously agreed otherwise.

The small numbers were ideal for seeing everyone on screen and also we were able to give each participant two opportunities of approximately five minutes each to share their answers to the questions that the book posed – and often there would be a short time to ask further questions or to seek clarifications.

*Life Spirit* has chapters about what choices we have made in life, what challenges we have faced and our views on and experiences with religion and spirituality.

I have to date found the time spent with the discussion group to be very special. We are all committed to reading the book and sharing our thoughts. And the more we meet the more relaxed we become about sharing our stories.

I feel it would have been difficult to have conducted this type of discussion with family, friends or work colleagues. But in our small Unitarian discussion group we have managed to share in a safe and confidential manner which at the same time is both liberating and enlightening.

In conclusion I feel that Zoom or other on-line platform provides an

ideal medium in which to get together to discuss fundamental questions with individual Unitarians or special interest groups. If the group agrees we will be offering our final thoughts to *News & Views* readers once we have finished our discussion of *Life Spirit*.

*Indra Sikdar*

*Would those who would like to be included in a second group on Zoom, following David Usher's book 'Life Spirit', please get in touch with Joan Wilkinson on: [joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk](mailto:joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk) or 01332 814055.*

## **The Unitarian Societies' Day 2020**

### **The National Unitarian Fellowship**

The National Unitarian Fellowship (NUF) took part in the Unitarian Societies Day.

Tony McNeile (Minister to the NUF) gave an introduction explaining that the Fellowship exists to give a sense of community for those who do not live near a Unitarian chapel, or do not wish to attend a chapel (possibly due to lack of time) or perhaps they wish to have fellowship via newsletters and social media rather than in person.

Many felt that the NUF could be used as an outreach to Non-Unitarians, showcasing both itself and other Unitarian Societies online. In the past some people have used the NUF to sample Unitarianism and occasionally gone on to become active members of a local chapel or indeed other Unitarian Societies.

The NUF is looking to update its website to make it look more modern and user friendly, particularly making it accessible to people using smart phones. There was a feeling that the NUF could create a safe space online where people could meet, discuss and explore spirituali-

ty, self-development and to possibly create on line communities. Presently the NUF produces a quarterly newsletter called News and Views. It also has a forum which facilitates discussion and a Facebook page. It also has a group that meets via Zoom to discuss Unitarian books.

The NUF also meet in person, for example at the General Assembly Annual Meeting and when the Unitarian Societies meet annually at Hucklow.

The committee is confident that as a team we will be successful in harnessing the power of the internet to attract a diverse group of spiritual seekers to the Unitarian family and possibly to cater to those who have traditionally or by choice not attended church.

*Indra Sikdar*

*For a report on the contributions by other Unitarian Societies at this event see The Inquirer January 9 2021, p.9.*

## **The Seven Principles**

*Adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association and reproduced here with the agreement of the UUA.*

Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote seven Principles, which we hold as strong values and moral guides. We live out these Principles within a “living tradition” of wisdom and spirituality, drawn from sources as diverse as science, poetry, scripture, and personal experience.

As Rev. Barbara Wells ten Hove explains, “The Principles are not dogma or doctrine, but rather a guide for those of us who choose to join and participate in Unitarian Universalist religious communities.”

1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;

2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;

3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;

4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

5th Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

6th Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;

7th Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The seven Principles and six Sources of the Unitarian Universalist Association grew out of the grassroots of our communities, were affirmed democratically, and are part of who we are.

For more information see <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles>.

## **SEND A CHILD TO HUCKLOW APPEAL 2021**

This year marks sixty years since the germ of an idea was planted – to help revitalise the Unitarian Holiday Centre at Great Hucklow by returning it to its roots, providing restorative countryside holidays for disadvantaged children from nearby cities. The brainchild of the Rev Peter Godfrey and the Rev Glyn Pruce, their appeal letter in *The Inquirer* of December 1961 raised the grand sum of £61 and funded the first Send a Child to Hucklow holiday in the summer of 1962 for children from inner-city Manchester.

Sixty years on and the need remains, not quite so much for the Nightingale Centre as for the children. We aim to provide holidays for around 250 each year, accompanied by leaders from their schools and community groups. We cover the cost from our annual appeal, from interest on legacies and gifts in memoriam, and from a number of grant-making trusts.

We've set ourselves the target of raising £60,000 in our 60th year. Unitarian congregations and individuals, and masonic lodges in the Midlands, usually are our mainstay, with generous donations from preaching fees and special collections at services, especially at Christmas, and from imaginative fundraising initiatives – from swimathons and glider flights to marathons and birthday bashes. Unfortunately, such activities were suspended for much of last year, and that was reflected in last year's fundraising – but expenditure also was down because, sadly, so many holidays had to be cancelled.

We are fortunate in having supporters who make regular donations while others respond generously to ad hoc appeals. Some cover the cost of an entire holiday for a child (£350 on average), or a day of



meals for one (£12), or an outing to a local attraction (£15), or a wonderful Nightingale Centre hot breakfast (£3) – much commented on by the children! - or take-home socks (£2.50 a pair) for wellies that will go with the outdoor clothing we bought last spring.

This pandemic has turned many people's lives upside-down, with loss of jobs and financial insecurity. For some, it has added to existing privations, and lockdowns have put even greater pressure on those whose domestic circumstances are challenging at the best of times. And the children are suffering, too – not only from disruption to their formal education, but in their social wellbeing. We can't wait for our holidays to resume so that children can get away from it all, be outdoors in the fresh Derbyshire air, enjoy wholesome food and have fun in a safe environment – even if only for a few days. A holiday at Hucklow can be transformative, and memories last a lifetime.

If you are looking for a worthwhile cause to support, Send a Child to Hucklow is a great place to start. See our website for the latest annual report and information on various ways of giving -

[www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk](http://www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk) -

or contact our donations treasurer, Ruth Taylor, at I Beech Close, Hanwood, Shrewsbury SY 5 8RA;

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Thank you!

*Christine Hayhurst, Secretary, Send a Child to Hucklow Fund*

### **The Foe** (by *Christine Short*)

A deadly foe escaped its cell  
Why did no-one ring the bell?  
Why did no-one guard the gate  
That let it through to seal our fate.

A doctor later rang the bell  
To warn the world, all was not well  
He disappeared, was soon to die  
And so the world began to cry.  
Very soon this world was changed  
Lives forever rearranged  
Loved ones died and were denied  
A final, family goodbye.  
Jobs were lost and schools were closed  
Hospitals in overload  
Medics working through the night  
To try and win this wretched fight.  
Locked away as if in jail  
Little children start to wail  
They miss their friends, they need to play  
To run and laugh like yesterday.  
Parents, what are they to do  
Despair is slowly creeping through  
Grandma, Grandpa, Uncle, Aunt,  
Think they can but NO THEY CAN'T  
They can't visit, they can't hug  
Teardrops fall, their shoulders shrug  
How much longer must they wait,  
Before the virus seals their fate.  
Teenagers become depressed  
They've studied hard, have done their best  
But now their future is on hold  
Their once high hopes are running cold.  
But now a 'miracle' is here  
Is it safe to raise a cheer?  
Magic droplets in the arm  
Do we trust they won't do harm?  
These vaccines so swiftly made  
Advice is not to be afraid  
Choice is virus or the jab  
Risk the foe or risk the lab.

## Virtual Connection

Why am I, an Interfaith Minister based in the North of the Scottish Highlands, writing about virtual connection? Well, I've worked for 15 years online and want to talk about the human angle. How do we make our online world a better place? How can basic virtues, like courage, compassion, generosity, patience, love, and forgiveness contribute?



Let's think about virtual meetings. What I find special is that we see each other but also our personal space, our view, or our family. It takes courage to share like this, but it creates a special connection. Whether you join in, sit back, or just nod or smile, you are present. You are making connections possible, especially for those who otherwise couldn't be part of your community.

I've been working online for a long time, first as an online facilitator, then as a moderator, a community manager, and an online teacher. I brought people together and helped build communities, and I helped keep the web a clean, safe space. Then came Facebook, Twitter and Instagram -- now called Social Media -- and what was once an intimate space became a busy, less personal space full of business and news.

In all of my roles I've seen the worst and the best of it, things I cannot unsee but also incredible kindness.

What I've learned is that the quality of virtual connections is not

about the technology, it's about people. It's about what you and I bring to the virtual table, how we treat each other and about our true intent.

For a long time I wasn't sure how to bring my experience into my ministry, but there is so much discontent and struggle that I think I owe it to minister to those who need support to find satisfying ways to connect online.

Why do we need to connect at all and why do we now need virtual connections?

Humans have always needed to share food and other resources, from our hunter-gatherer times to creating farming communities, in order to thrive. This core need also exists in virtual connections. During the pandemic neighbourhood support groups quickly appeared online to connect those who needed help with those who could provide it.

However, we also need social connection -- friends, family, acquaintances, and a link to the wider community. Without these, loneliness may make us ill or threaten our survival. At the core of these social connections is the need to be loved and seen.

Some feel that those who share on social media are vain, or are looking for attention or validation. While I see the risks, I also think there is something healthy about needing to be seen.

During my interfaith minister training we did an exercise where we stood face to face saying 'I see you, and I am here to be seen'. It moved me profoundly. It's said that "four minutes of eye contact brings people closer to each other better than everything else". It breaks down prejudices and barriers. When I put myself out there

with everyday pictures and snippets of my everyday life, I enable you to see me.

Our lives have changed -- we meet more people now and in different contexts. Through technology, we can keep links that might have been broken or have diluted to an exchange of Christmas cards.

My own story is a good example of how lives can change. I was born in Austria and left for short periods in my early twenties and for good when I was 27. I made connections everywhere I lived and stayed in touch when I moved on. I moved here to an area that has about 800 people and takes about an hour to drive across. There aren't many people to meet for coffee and even fewer with whom I share interests or feel an affinity for. But I don't feel isolated because I have virtual friends who are as essential as real life friends. Without them, I would be very lonely.

So how can we make our virtual connections more positive and constructive?

First, it's worth remembering it's about what we can do, all of us. We can find guidance and inspiration in all faith paths because most spiritual traditions emphasise the importance of goodwill, or love.

As I was wondering how to pass on my views about better virtual connections, I was inspired by a Presbyterian minister in the US who has written a book, *Friending in a Virtual World*. Her thoughts about being a good virtual friend are based on two pieces about love from the New Testament. One is Paul's First letter to the Corinthians.

I don't have the space she had so I've gone down the daring route of

rewriting Paul's words. Taking out 'Love', and referring to being online and virtual connections.

*When I am online I am patient, and I am kind. In my virtual connections I do not envy, I do not brag, I am not arrogant. When I am online I am not selfish or rude, I don't demand to get my own way, I am not irritable, I don't bear grudges, I hardly even notice when others do it wrong. In my virtual connections I am not happy with injustice, but I rejoice when the truth wins out. When I am online I am always supportive, always loyal, always hopeful, and I always persevere.*

So how can we be loving and caring while sharing online?

First, let us be in control and act with intent. We might be tempted to sit back and watch what's happening in the world of our Friends, our Groups, or Pages. We want to be entertained or proven right. But why not give rather than take?

Two years ago I consciously changed the way I use Social Media, and rather than spending time I invest time. I actively look for Friends I really want to connect with. It takes longer but it makes the experience so much richer.

Because love is kind we need to make the effort to truly see and take in what others are sharing, a kind of virtual deep listening. So let's slow down so that our Friends' posts can move from our minds to our hearts. My heart stores those memories more readily than my brain!

Because loving virtual connection is patient and loyal and definitely not rude, let's accept that not everything others share will interest us. Even if it bores or annoys us, if we respect our virtual connections we meet others where they are -- their kitchen or their garden, an unpleasant experience with a neighbour, ranting or venting, worries and

heartaches, even their love for pictures of kittens. Sharing itself is their gift, not the content.

The same goes for accepting that some share more and, like in 'real life', those we love most might not share much.

In the words of Sufi mystic Rumi, "Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond."

There is one caveat. I always look for those who are silent or invisible after sharing something they may be struggling with. It's the same as looking for houses with the curtains drawn or the newspapers and post piling up. Is there somebody in need? That is the moment to knock on the door, virtually!

Because our aim is to be supportive, we need to make it obvious that we've listened by leaving a Like or a comment.

Finally, we need to remember that, because love always perseveres, when things get difficult we don't despair or give up. There may be misunderstandings. We can't hear the tone of a voice or see facial expressions, and we may misinterpret silence. We may doubt the virtual connection is viable or valuable or blame technology, but the collateral damage may be the person we are connecting with.

Genuinely good connections are dependent on giving and receiving, so we need to put ourselves out there. It starts when we share a part of ourselves virtually, offering insight into our life and passions, but also our struggles and vulnerability. It takes courage but we need to let others see and talk to us. To receive support, we must be willing to ask for help. By sharing and listening, our virtual connections will succeed.

All of these things sound like work rather than fun but let's call it a labour of love.

A quote by Indian monk and yogi Paramahansa Yogananda sums up the core of how to cultivate virtual connections:

*There is a magnet in your heart that will attract true friends. That magnet is unselfishness, thinking of others first; when you learn to live for others, they will live for you.*

In the not too distant future, we will be meeting each other in person again. Meanwhile, I'm grateful that we have virtual connections to enrich our lives.

*Monika Strell*

## **Loneliness in Covid-19 times - challenge or opportunity for modern society?**

I watched a talk show on Swedish television recently. A Norwegian journalist, Fredrik Skavlan, interviewed Noreena Hertz about her studies into loneliness, which is an ever increasing problem around the globe. More and more people, especially the elderly, feel lonely. I suppose this feeling has increased during the past months, when everything is affected by the terrible Covid-19 virus. The digital development has also changed our ways of communicating and socializing.





Many people shop “online”, and have their shopping, quickly and without any contact with people, delivered to their front door. Hertz stresses that we need face to face contact with other people, some kind of feeling of belonging to a community, the so called “micro exchanges” such as customers and shop assistants saying good morning to each other.

Not having any social contacts and feeling forgotten, left alone, is as damaging to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes per day. According to Hertz, the number of prisoners in Japanese prisons has increased in recent years. In generally law abiding Japan the greatest increase in crime is caused by the elderly committing petty crimes in order to get into prison, just to have some company.

This situation has created a new employment field, “rent a friend”. Hertz talks about her experience in New York recently. She “rented” a friend for 3 hours, they went to a café, drank a cup of coffee, went shopping etc, for the cost of 120 dollars (about £100).

According to Hertz, 620,000 people in the USA have offered their services as a “rented friend” for a few hours to accompany them to the cinema, to an art gallery, to go shopping etc. The main customer group, however, is not the elderly but younger people in their 30’s or 40’s. Such people are often so tied up with their jobs and careers that they do not or cannot socialize with their friends, family or relatives.

These two factors, the Covid-19 virus and the increasing usage of digital technology, have in my view, created a new kind of society, which I do not really like. This new way of living is not good for our health or wellbeing. Weaker groups, such as the elderly and those with few

friends may feel even more cut off from the community. According to Hertz, recent surveys of Britain show that 1 out of 5 British people feel lonely all the time and 1 out of 8 say they do not have a close friend.

Is that the kind of society we want? Shouldn't modern technology be creating a better society and way of living, leading to greater happiness? Helping people communicate more easily and more conveniently? Bringing people and communities together? Or does the increased usage of digital technology and social media separate people and communities?

I will not go into how the Covid-19 virus has been and is being dealt with in different countries, whether "total lockdowns" are the best method to curb the spreading of the virus and whether the UK or Swedish policies are the best – time will tell. I guess that even within countries, cities and rural areas there are differences as to how people cope and help each other through this situation. The Covid-19 virus and its short term and long term effects cannot be fully understood, analyzed and evaluated at the moment but there is a pressing need for at least interim solutions to the growing problem of loneliness.

Hertz argues that by international standards there is a lack of meeting points in the UK and suggests that commercial meeting points should be set up. She suggests that in the short term this would help to reduce loneliness somewhat. However, while many people in affluent parts of Sweden and the USA may be able to afford such commercial arrangements, the lonely in the UK may often be found in more deprived parts of the population. This is where I think Unitarian congregations can help.

I have previously argued for the need of places for reflection, many people today are in the hamster wheel, with noise around them all the time. But much as we need company, we also need time and space to just sit down and “get our breath back” in a quiet and safe environment.

I think all Unitarian congregations and other charities should reflect on their daily activities and functions. Today, many board and committee meetings, even conferences, theatre performances, church services etc, that were previously face to face events, are now “online” or “streamed”. But a “streamed” theatre play, for instance, never really gives you the same enjoyment or feelings as it would if you had seen the event live. I think the Covid-19 pandemic will be regarded in the future as a turning point. We will not return to “normal” (whatever that was) i.e. the situation before the Covid-19 outbreak.

I think we all must think and plan for the future – about a wide range of subjects that all interlock – how we communicate with each other, how we keep our community together and well informed, how and when to use modern IT devices and services. We need to find the optimal mixture of digitalized and person to person methods of socializing and communicating. We need to review our organisations’ set-up, daily routines and procedures, how their activities are planned and how information about them is spread – the list can be made very long.

Hertz regards social media as being “the tobacco industry of our time” – meaning that usage of digital technology and social media is as addictive as tobacco. What will happen to the “traditional media”,

magazines, newspapers, radio and television and what will be their role in the future? Growth of digital technology would have forced societies to consider these questions sooner or later, but the Covid-19 pandemic has given the need to find answers a new urgency.

*Peter Zoné*

Peter Zoné is a member of the NUF Committee. He lives in Sweden.

## **What Do You Think? Two thoughts from Phil**

- Sometimes a popular song catches your attention, for various reasons, sometimes with unusual results. Let me tell you about one of my experiences.

Have you ever heard the catchy bit of a long love song: “I’ll be riding shotgun/underneath the hot sun/feeling like a someone”? It became an ‘earworm’ for me, but it took a while to catch the third line. In fact I had to look it up-and I often misremember the key word ‘Feeling’. I think “Looking” works better. Either way, it shows a sad, shallow sense of self-worth. The original use of ‘riding shotgun, was in the wild west, where stage coaches hired gunmen to protect them from attack. So, very macho, dangerous, exciting; and appealing to women-and men. The modern meaning is “riding in the passenger seat of a fancy convertible showing off;” “feeling like a someone”. “Looking” is what the singer is telling the girl about as he leaves town. “Feeling” perhaps is more boastful. Either way, see what she will be missing...

We all need to BE someone, to be appreciated, to FEEL worthy-underneath the hot sun...

- A human's life is like being in a boat on a stream with a steering wheel, a sail and an engine, subject to the weather. We do not provide the equipment or the weather, but we are not just leaves on a stream, we have consciousness and agency and we have varying abilities to grow, learn, dream, plan and act- finite, but wonderful.

*Phil Silk*

## **BOOK SUGGESTIONS**

### **Dancing with Mortality - Reflections of a Lapsed Atheist By Bert Clough**

Honesty and authenticity run through this book, as the author reflects on questions we may all ask at some time in our lives.

Based on sermons preached at Meadow Chapel, Godalming and Harris Manchester College Chapel, Oxford, the 15 chapters have allowed the author to extend his reflections, giving a coherence through reference back and forth between the chapters. 'Do we need a God?' 'Is prayer effective?' 'Should religion influence ethics and government?' 'Is Christianity on the left or the right of politics?' 'Can there be just wars?' 'How could anti-Semitism have co-existed with established religion?' 'Can religion move us from a meaningless existence to a meaningful life?' These are the questions he addresses through the lives of

men and women whom he considers have lived 'authentic' lives. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Buddha, Norbert Capek, Jesus Christ, Dorothy Day, Mahatma Gandhi, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Albert Schweitzer, Wainstill and Martha Sharp. This allows the reader to visit again or read for the first time, something about the lives of these great spiritual leaders. The author has certainly researched well his material for this book.

The book will appeal to freethinkers, humanists and Unitarians. However, I would advise more than one quick read. Unlike sermons, which all too often may soon be forgotten, this book gives us an opportunity to return again and again to continue the conversations as we reflect on specific, yet universal issues of what life means to each of us as individuals and how we would want to live justly and fairly in the wider society. What can we learn from each other and from those great spiritual leaders of the past?

The book was published in 2020 and can be obtained directly from the author at: [b.clough947@gmail.com](mailto:b.clough947@gmail.com) or through Amazon.

*Joan Wilkinson*

## **PHIL'S BOOK NOTES**

Time to report on some of my recent reading. Some variety. Hope you find the notes interesting, maybe even find something to read yourself. Would love to hear from you about your responses. ([pandjsilk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:pandjsilk@yahoo.co.uk)). I promise to reply...

1. THE WORLD UNTIL YESTERDAY: What can we learn from Traditional Societies? By Jared Diamond, a professor of geography at UCLA and a polymath whose work has influenced anthropology, biology, ornithology, ecology and history-at least. Penguin. 2012. 500 pages of text and aides.

Based on evidence from 39 societies, especially from personal work for over 40 years in Papua New Guinea, he finds patterns amidst the great variety, which help us to consider what we can learn from comparing stages in the developing ways humans live. It appears that the earliest groups of humans were bands of a few dozen individuals, until around 11,000 years ago, by which time they were becoming tribes of hundreds of individuals, mostly farmers or herders, some of which survive now. By 5500BC, chiefdoms emerge. By 3400BC states were evolving- and still are, with bigger and bigger combinations of states.

He explores a variety of issues faced by all of us and compares many of the ways people have dealt with them, including “Friends, Enemies, Strangers and Traders”; “Peace and War”; “Compensation for the Death of a Child”; Bringing up Children”; “The Treatment of Old People”; “Danger and Response”; “Religion, Language and Health”; ending with an Epilogue in which he tries to draw some conclusions. There is so much detail, in the book and in the conclusions, let me just say as far as he is concerned, there is much to be learned by exploring past ways of being human, some attractive, some less so, but that there is no one way to achieve a decent life. Understand the options, consider the potential consequences, clarify your values and help each other work together for a safer and healthier life. Sounds good to me.

2. NEW YORK a novel by Edward Rutherford author of LONDON. Arrow Books. 1020 pages. 2009.

This is a saga retelling the History of the USA through the lives of a series of people and their families, from 1664 to 2009. Drama, characters, ideas-with amazing links to actual historic events. Better than I expected. [NB the Editor's wife recommends LONDON too.]

3. WHY US?: How Science Rediscovered the Mystery of Ourselves by James Le Fanu. Harper Press. 2010; 303 pages.

He believes humans are 'wonderful', but under appreciated."We are, after all, a mystery to ourselves". So he sets out to trace the history of the universe as seen by people who are (the only ones?) aware of themselves and their world. He begins with a list of thirty definitive moments of discovery from 1945-2001 (pp4-5), crediting a wide variety of universal fields of knowledge with helping us gain a better-but incomplete-understanding of the amazing world in which we live. Then he proceeds to discuss the results. Well worth a read.

4. A SPARK OF LIGHT, a novel by Jodi Picoult. Hodder & Stoughton. 2018. 356pages

This is the story of 'ordinary' people who become involved in a serious exploration of abortion on a personal level while confronting a violently upset father at an abortion clinic. The author has told the story on one day, starting with the situation at 5pm, then tells it backwards, hour by hour to the official start at 9am, then switching to the messy conclusion at 6pm. Back stories are revealed as we go along. Whatever our preconceptions, I suspect our views will be broadened.



I for one became involved with the characters even more than the ideas- despite preferring stories told in old-fashioned linear style.

5. DEMENTIA: The One-Stop Guide by June Andrews, author of TEN HELPFUL HINTS FOR CARERS. Profile Books. 2012. 378 pages.

Intended as practical advice for families, professionals and people living with dementia, this reflects the author's long experience of working in the field. She is now Director of Dementia Services in the School of Applied Social Science at Stirling University.

This book was sent to me by well-wishers who knew it would be useful, as it had been for them. I had already read another such book, but found this so good I bought my own copy so I could mark it up and keep using it for aspects which would be needed later and for reviewing sections. I can lend out the other one-and already have.

There are 15 chapters including ones on definitions, getting a diagnosis, and various ways of coping with the disease(s) (several different types). Even if you do not face these issues yourself, you can benefit from learning more about the society in which you live.

*Phil Silk*

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## Spring Poems 2 and 3

the peering genre

poetry

it presses the pause button on life  
and lets us appreciate  
the silence of buds swelling,  
the noiseless unfurling of leaves,  
the soft fall of rain.



---

Snowdrops

February's fair maids  
flower early, alone.

Feisty leaf tips push  
through Earth's frozen counterpane  
to proclaim a hope,  
a new beginning.

Their heads are dipped in prayer:  
closed, they are teardrop earrings;  
but when open,  
elegant anglepoises  
dispel Winter's darkness.



*Liz Brownhill*

# National Unitarian Fellowship

Affiliated to the General Assembly of  
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*Linking those who value Freedom, Reason and Tolerance in Religion*

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