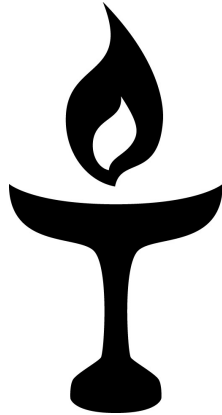


# MU NOW

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## THE MAGAZINE OF THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

ISSUE 68

SPRING 2023

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[www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk](http://www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk)

### Officers of the Midland Unitarian Association Inc.

#### THE PRESIDENT

Ms. Cressida Pryor,  
12, Cheltenham Road, Winchcombe, Glos. GL54 5ND  
Tel: 01242-604120 e-mail: zenzialink@hotmail.com

#### VICE PRESIDENT

Mr. David Taylor,  
15, Brier Mill Rd, Halesowen B63 3AA  
Tel: 0121-550-8874 e-mail: editorusps@yahoo.co.uk

#### IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Ms. Debra Burbery,  
59, Ascot Rd, Oswestry, Shropshire SY11 2RE  
Tel: 07809-724644 e-mail: debraburbery@yahoo.co.uk

#### SECRETARY / DISTRICT MINISTER

Rev. Sue Woolley,  
5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN  
Tel: 0785 325 3880 e-mail: revsuewoolley@gmail.com

#### TREASURER

Mr Kieren Mardle-Moss,  
202, Marston Lane, Attleborough, Nuneaton CV11 4RH  
Tel: 07515-570883 e-mail: kierenmoss@me.com

### AIMS OF THE MUA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Support congregations
- Make things happen by providing leadership and initiating projects
- Find resourceful solutions
- Connect Unitarians in the Midlands

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**From the Editor**

Welcome to the Spring 2023 issue of *MU Now*. It includes a review of the Spring Training Day on 13th May, a fascinating article on preparing for ministry by Peter Godfrey, and a tribute to our retiring Treasurer, Sandy Ellis, who stood down at the AGM, after 40 years' service. Plus a summary of our Guest Speaker Geoff Levermore's talk, also at the AGM.

And, some District news! Thank you so much to Stourbridge and Warwick for providing some.

My thanks to everyone who contributed.

**Submissions to *MU Now***

We are particularly looking for stories on local activities, or with a local interest, in addition to articles on the theme.

The theme for the next issue, due out in September, is "The Environment". The deadline for submissions is Friday 1st September 2023.

Please send your contributions to me at [revsuewoolley@gmail.com](mailto:revsuewoolley@gmail.com) or to 5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN.

THANK YOU!

*Sue Woolley*

## President's Piece



It is a huge privilege and in many ways a surprise to be writing as MUA President for *MU Now*...

A surprise as first of all; I'm not from the Midlands! So in many ways these are strange lands...! I've lived and worked for most of my life in the 'home counties'... I'm rural Hertfordshire born and bred... my family were merchants, brewers and farmers...

And secondly, the surprise is that twelve years ago, if you'd asked me about Unitarianism, I would have looked at you blankly... never having heard of this denomination, this movement... Some of my ancestors were Quakers, but that was all I knew then of dissenting folk... So how come I am writing this piece now?

To be blunt... twelve years ago when I first met some Unitarians I was thrilled to find a community of welcoming spiritual people who a) met every week b) met in a building and c) met where you didn't have to wear a huge heavy, medieval style cloak... Heavy wool or crushed velvet cloaks were *de rigueur* in my 'then' faith world!

You see, as an Earth Spirit follower; an honorary Druid... I was used to meeting up just eight times a year at a sacred site or under a tree, whatever the weather... this could be wonderful or, at the midwinter Solstice...rather nippy! Hence the warm cloak...

BUT it is much more than the regular services and the warm buildings that has held me to this denomination... I could sum up what this quality is, in the word 'Ubuntu'.

A few weeks ago Dr Kevin Watson led a service at Bayshill, my home congregation, on Archbishop Desmond Tutu... part of that service was on the African spirit, ethic or morality of Ubuntu...

*Ubuntu* tells us: we are only who we are, thanks to other people. Every interaction will have brought us to where we are today. Who we are is a summation of our relationships...

*Ubuntu* teaches us that absolutely everyone on this earth is of equal value because our humanity is what matters the most. Instead of comparing ourselves to others, we should value other people's contributions to our day-to-day life.

I am because we are... we are because I am... WE ARE INTERDEPENDENT... and as Professor Levermore reminded us in his talk at the MUA's March meeting, the 'we' might well be far removed from us both geographically and chronologically... they might not yet be born. What we do now does impact and relate to those yet to come...

So this Ubuntu thread weaves back and forward in time... We are all truly who we are through others... QUANTUM UBUNTU! And that's why I keep attending Bayshill... because it's a community of souls I feel deeply connected to... I aim to be a better person through my connection there... through the conversations we have there... I can take the risk of journeying with them to challenge and change my outmoded ways of behaving... ways that irritate and frustrate others...

It's not always easy... some folk, me included... are contrary and difficult, some politically quite different to each other... And this brings me to the MUA... an association which supports and connects the disparate Midland Unitarian congregations...

supports our interdependence so we can share and grow with one another... We can meet together, pray together, train together, learn together and not least, laugh together!

May we in the MUA work together to make this a better world. So with the spirit of Ubuntu; I am because we are... May we all also remember the eternal truth; that ultimately we are never alone.

**Cressida Pryor**

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### **District Minister: Spring Update**

Hello again. Here's a summary of what I've been doing, around the Midland Unitarian Association.

**Leading worship around the Midland Unitarian Association:** Since March 2020, I have been producing an online service for the District each week, which has been posted around by e-mail and also on the MUA website and am continuing to do so. But now that I am no longer President of the General Assembly, I am very much enjoying leading worship around the District as I did before.

The **Spring Training Day**, on the topic of 'Vision, Change and Connection' was facilitated by Lizzie Kingston-Harrison, the GA's Congregational Connections Lead. It was a very interesting day and I have turned my notes into an article for those of you who missed it (see page 8).

I am a fully qualified **spiritual director**. I offer direction sessions, on a one-to-one basis. Please contact me if you are interested.

**And if you are feeling alone and would like to hear another human voice, please feel free to give me a call on 01604 870746 or 0785 325 3880...**

**Sue Woolley, District Minister, Midland Unitarian Association**

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### **MUA Executive Committee Key Messages**

The Key Messages from our January meeting have already been shared in the relevant issue of *Bits & Pieces*, the monthly news-sheet sent to all congregations. Those which are still current are reproduced below.

1 National EC Link: We were pleased to welcome our new National EC Link, Rev Jo James of Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds, to his first MUA meeting.

Cressida Pryor: tel: 01242-604120; zenziainlink@hotmail.com  
Sue Woolley: tel: 01604-870746; revsuewoolley@gmail.com

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### **Vision, Change & Connection by Sue Woolley**

On Saturday 13th May, four of us enjoyed a stimulating workshop on Zoom, facilitated by Lizzie Kingston-Harrison, the General Assembly's Congregational Connections Lead, and by Gavin Howell, the GA's Youth Officer. It was about exploring new ways to nurture vision, change and connection, and the relationships between them.

Lizzie explained that the first step is to find out what people want and / or need first, by asking questions – every community is

different. Then, when we know this, we can formulate a vision of what change we want to happen.

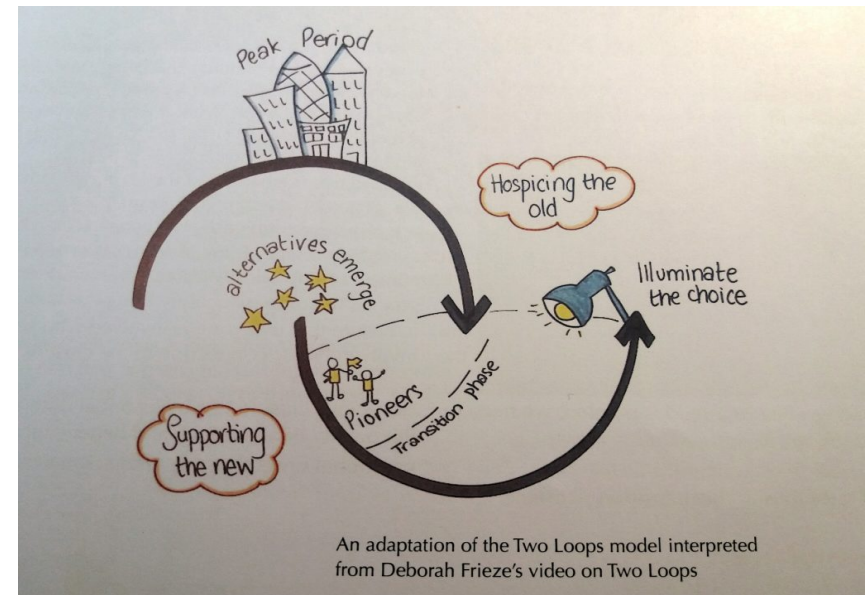
When we have a vision to implement, connection and collaboration are essential. We can change well by allowing it to happen. Change can be gradual and emergent, rather than abrupt. It's about putting vision into action through building connections. There is a need for passion, determination, persistence, and commitment to the vision, as well as creativity and imagination. Building connections is about both serving others and asking for help.

Lizzie shared a quote by Gary Lloyd, about the need to be “gardeners not mechanics.” In other words, change should be a very organic process, following paths as they open up, tending our ideas, nurturing our connections. “Co-creation” is another word for collaboration. It's about taking risks, not being afraid to fail, but learning from our mistakes. Someone mentioned the *Parable of the Sower* from the New Testament – if you remember, some seeds fall on stony ground, some get eaten by birds, other plants are choked by thorns, but some seed grows well.

So how can we help to cultivate the necessary passion, vision, connection-building and risk-taking? She suggests it is as simple as offering a space in which change can happen. There are a few necessities:

- Identifying our vision / passion.
- Clear communication, so that we carry our community with us.
- Preparation of good ideas, principles and tools.
- The secondary role of supporting and facilitating the original vision.

Lizzie then explained the Two Loops model of system change (see diagram below). We are all part of systems – e.g. congregations, the District, wider society. There is a continual process going on within systems of growth, followed by decay, then regrowth. We start with the old paradigm, which peaks, then declines. Meanwhile, people start new things by making connections with others. Which leads to a new paradigm. Gradually we begin to create a strong “new normal”. Then there has to be a bridge between the old and the new. And a light to illuminate the choice. The old system nourishes the new system. We also need to “hospice” the old system, helping people to let go of the old ways of working and grieve for what is lost.



Then Gavin told us about what he has been doing at Torbay. His role has grown organically, through getting in touch with local community groups without any agenda, rather than people having to come into a church / chapel space. He explained the

importance of listening; that there has been no action plan, but rather reaction to what people say. It is about sitting with discomfort, allowing change to emerge organically. Holding the space well. Gavin linked this process to the “free and enquiring religion” bit of the GA Object. He emphasised that it is most important to try new things – not everything will work, but we have to learn from our experiences. It is necessary to be open, present, curious, brave, playful, respectful and trusting.

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### **Climate Change, Religion and Ethics, a talk by our AGM speaker, Prof. Geoff Levermore**

Professor Levermore spent the first 45 minutes of his talk explaining about climate change, and about the various impacts it is having on the planet. He commented that the science of climate change is now pretty well known, but that we urgently need to break the link between energy and prosperity, and to increase our use of renewable energy sources.

Sadly, the human and political response to this crisis has not been uniformly positive. Governments and big companies are dragging their feet. And global warming and the size of the world’s population are both spiralling out of control. As a result, the planned limit of a 1.5% rise in temperature is now not achievable. He estimated that the best scenario would be 2.1%. And energy demand is only going to increase as developing countries raise their standard of living to be in line with that of the West. China and India are now huge players. But still, Europe has emitted the most energy since the Industrial Revolution began in the 1750s.

Professor Levermore explained that 26% of greenhouse gas emissions come from food production (especially of meat and dairy products) and that reducing our own consumption would help. He recommended a book, *Food and Climate Change* by S.L. Bridle, as a good guide to how to achieve this. However, it seems that few people in the West are willing to make radical lifestyle changes. Therefore there is a need for more renewable energy. Unfortunately this sometimes results in a bounce-back effect, because as items we use become more energy efficient (e.g. low energy light bulbs), more people are leaving them on overnight. So policies, regulation and incentives are needed, at an international level.

Another chilling statistic is that although 37% of the world’s electricity production is now from renewables, hydro and nuclear power, the world’s electricity production is only 19% of the world’s energy consumption.

He then moved on to religion and climate change. He mentioned Kaufman’s new theology of God as “the mystery of Creation” – ongoing creativity in the cosmos. To explain Kaufman’s theology simply, he suggested that we read the first part of Chapter 1 of the *Gospel of John*, substituting “creativity” for “the Word”. He stated that there are three miracles of creativity: the Big Bang, the mystery of life starting on Earth and the miracle that is the human brain, which is able to conceive of amazing things such as ethics, religion, good and evil.

He said that we need to give our love not only to human creation but also to all living things and to the planet. Working together in community is more natural for humankind. As groups become larger, the concept of “the common good” comes into play.

Altruistic morality is at a higher level. And the top level of morality is doing good for someone we will never know, and never meet. For example, planting trees we will never see maturing, because they are essential for the planet's survival.

He concluded by saying that there is a climate crisis, that the demand for energy will continue to increase, and that renewables will be a big part of any solution.

When I thanked him, I took the opportunity of mentioning the new Lindsey Press book, *Cherishing the Spirit – Nourishing the Earth*, which has contributions by many Unitarians on this topic and is well worth a read.

**Sue Woolley**

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### **Preparing for Ministry by Peter Godfrey**

At the recent April General Assembly Meetings I much enjoyed attending a session that celebrated Welsh Unitarianism. During the gathering I was reminded of the fact that my wish to become a Unitarian minister was inspired and encouraged by two very fine Welsh ministers.

The first was Rev. T. J. Jones - 'TJ'. He became minister at Coventry's Great Meeting House in 1948, when I was seventeen. T.J. got the young people actively engaged in the morning service, had a teenagers group for discussion in the vestry after the service, took an afternoon service at Warwick and then the evening service back at the GMH. At the evening service the young people all sat in the front row of seats as all the others were full. Does any Midlander remember those plus cinema-style tip-up seats? I missed them at the recent MUA AGM.

In his delightful book *Best Foot Forward*, Rev. Eric Jones speaks of TJ as always having a twinkle in his eyes. This was very true. Incidentally, Eric's book about his sixty years of ministry in South Wales is an excellent read and highly recommended.

TJ had followed my first Unitarian minister, Rev. Richard Lee, who was also a very inspiring person. He was minister in Coventry from 1928 to 1947. He was a local councillor and there is a school in Coventry named after him. He was, I think, Scottish. He was minister at the GMH when I wandered into the meeting house after I had returned to Coventry from being evacuated with Bablake School to Lincoln.

Both Richard Lee and TJ encouraged my thinking about going into the ministry and set wonderful examples of the good that ministers can do.

They were supportive when I decided that I wanted to go to university before ministerial training while I made up my mind. I did this at Sheffield University where I took a delightful course in Biblical History and Literature, Philosophy and Psychology. My first year was spent in 'digs' where the house was less than a hundred yards from Unity Church. There the minister was the Welshman Rev. E. David Davies - 'ED'. I soon became very friendly with ED and his wife Emily and often baby-sat for their son Glyn. I spent four very happy years attending Unity Church being inspired by the ministry and example of ED. Rather ironically, I only went to Upper Chapel when Unity people attended special services there. Little did I know that many years later I would have nineteen years as minister at Upper. I didn't sit on the front row at Unity in those days, especially because in the later years it was a back row pew with my girlfriend – Sheila.

From Sheffield University I went to Manchester College Oxford for training for the Unitarian ministry. Reminiscing like this has made me think about how the age for coming into the ministry has changed over the years. Nowadays most people start training after having spent some years in another sphere of work. In many ways I can see that this is a good thing. Women and men coming into ministry later in life have experience of ‘how the other half lives’.

Did I miss this? Of course I missed it in depth, but this reminiscing has reminded me of another thing. This is of the numerous jobs I did during the vacations whilst a student. Some of these jobs remind me of how different things were seventy or so years ago. For example, an early job was at Coventry Rugby Football Club. For a few weeks one year I telephoned match reports from the telephone below the stands to the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* for the ‘Pink Un’, the Saturday evening sports paper. The reports were written by a sports reporter and every twenty minutes I nipped down to the one telephone and phoned the report. This could be hilarious at the end of the game when the players could hear what I was phoning. Imagine – one telephone at a top football ground. Like many other students through the years I did a post round at Christmas time – there was often a mince pie in those days. I also worked in the office at both Armstrong Siddeley, where my father worked for fifty years, and Carbodies, that made the bodies for London taxis.

A summer portering at Paddington station was an eye-opener. Of course when a person got off a taxi and wanted the train for, say, Exeter, I had to go to the board and find what platform to go to. I remember one person saying in a very proud voice – “Why haven’t I got a proper porter?” Porters had a small room for eating their sandwiches and making a cup of tea. They weren’t trusted – the only spoon was chained to the table. I also worked at a hotel

in Bayswater, London. This was overnight. My work began with scrubbing the floor of the kitchen after the day’s work. This was not pleasant as the floor was greasy and crawling with cockroaches. Having done that I was on the night desk. Couples would come in and book and pay for a room – and within an hour they had left. I was so naive that it took me a while to realise what was going on. There was a problem in that I was liable to fall asleep at the reception desk and people were banging on the door to get back to their rooms after a late night out. What a learning experience! And it all helped me to save money for my honeymoon.

Twice I worked for dairies. The first time was in Sheffield at the end of a summer term. I was loading milk bottles into crates. One of the permanent workers was always shouting as he worked “Watch it! Watch it what you sign.” Advice that has stood me in good stead, but I am still wondering what experience had prompted him to keep shouting this... The other dairy was in Grimsby. This was in order to be nearer Sheila who lived in Cleethorpes. The eye opener as to how some of the other half lived was that I had to start work as soon as possible after six in the morning. I was responsible for loading an open topped small lorry with milk and bread for taking to Co-op shops in nearby towns such as Louth. The sooner I got to work, the less delay there was in loading up. I also dropped milk off at some outlying houses and farms. One day my lorry broke down – it had been serviced the day before and the top on the oil sump had not been put back properly. Someone came out to get me going again but I was very late in my rounds. I shall never forget how cross they were at one house. A lifelong reminder to me to check the details before complaining.

During my first ministry in Swinton and Urmston, I also learnt something of how teachers managed. Daughter Pamela was born



two years into the ministry and Sheila stopped teaching. It was a bit tricky managing on my £425 per annum stipend, so I had two sessions of part-time teaching. In the first I taught maths. I knew very little maths and had not had any teaching training – it showed. Fortunately there were no Ofsted appearances during that time. The second session was standing in one term for a Religious Education teacher for sixth formers at a Grammar School. That was a sheer delight.

So, although I went straight from education into ministry I was not without some valuable experience of ‘how the other half lives’. I also had the advantage of not being tied down to one spot by owning a house. Moves to Altrincham and then Sheffield were made without the worry of having to sell a house and look for another one – but I did have that worry when moving from Upper Chapel to the LDPA ministry. Moreover, it was fairly easy for Sheila to find a teaching post when we moved to Sheffield – she was the only applicant for the post of French teacher. Having said that, while at Sheffield we realised the necessity of getting into the housing market. It was becoming clear that what savings we were able to make would not cover the cost of a garage let alone a house.

What did all my experiences teach me? I have mentioned some of these, but overall one thing stands out. This is the awareness that in some ways the minister is often not so much a leader on the front line but rather a carer, supporter and encourager for those who are on the front line.

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## **Sandy Ellis retires as MUA Treasurer after 40 years’ service**

Sandy became a member of Unitarian New Meeting Church in Birmingham in 1981. He was soon elected to the Vestry, and his first action was to overhaul the congregation’s accounts! In 1983, forty long years ago, he took over from Charles Beale as Treasurer of the then Midland Union of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches (now the Midland Unitarian Association). Under his careful stewardship, the Association has thrived, and has been able to support its congregations financially, and in many other ways. His involvement has gone considerably beyond the bounds of the job description; over the years he has visited all the District’s congregations, offering advice and support and helping them solve problems of all kinds. For most congregations he has been their first port of call in times of trouble.

The District Sandy became Treasurer of looked very different to the MUA Inc. of today. I’ve managed to lay my hands on a copy of the 117th annual report, for the year ending 31st December 1982, immediately before he became Treasurer. And can reveal that as well as the President, Secretary and Treasurer, and the eight ordinary members of the Executive Committee, there were no less than NINE Vice Presidents! Who were all the past Presidents. There were also 21 congregations and one Fellowship, more than twice as many as there are now.

It has been fascinating to look at the accounts for that year: the total income was something over £7,260 and the excess of income over expenditure just under £180. Nearly £2,000 of the expenditure was in the form of grants, either to congregations or other Unitarian bodies. The balance sheet stood at £24,314.18. There were also accounts for several other funds, most of which have now been incorporated into the MUA. Interestingly, no less

than 10 of the 17 pages of the report were taken up by financial matters, with a roll of the churches (like the current congregational directory), the Executive Committee's report, and those of the Ministers' Meeting and the Birmingham & District Women's League taking up the other seven.

These days, our Annual Report is far more substantial, and the accounts and notes to the accounts take up only 11 of the 36 pages. But they are clearly set out and easy to understand. Which again, is down to Sandy's hard work. In forty years, our balance sheet has grown to a little over £365,000, and will be considerably more next year, following the transfer of the assets of the Kidderminster and Dudley congregations. Last year, our charitable grants totalled £38,614.



I would particularly like to pay tribute to the incredible amount of hard work Sandy has undertaken in relation to our change in status to MUA Inc, and in helping the congregations of Kidderminster and Dudley to wind up their affairs. All of which has taken him many, many hours of grinding and frustrating toil. And he has also done his level best to get as many outstanding issues sorted out before handing over the reins to Kieren. It was a pleasure to present him with a memento at the

2023 AGM at The Great Meeting House Unitarian Church in Coventry. My thanks to Bronwen Taylor of Shrewsbury for the photo.

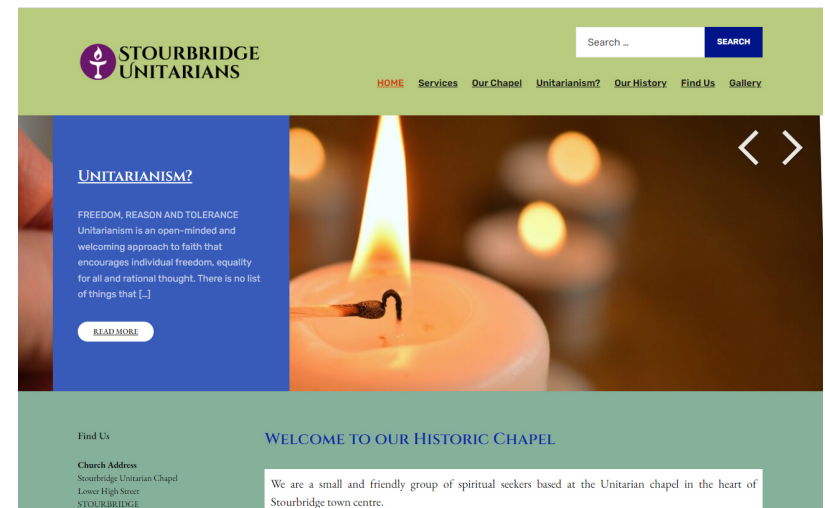
**Sue Woolley (proud daughter!)**

## District Round Up

### Stourbridge joins the digital age!

Stourbridge Unitarians at last have a new website! Thanks to the efforts of congregation member David Taylor who has been working with Chris Lewis of Devus Design, Stourbridge Unitarians at last have a website that will showcase their presence in the town.

Chris from Devus Design made working on the site an easy and pleasant experience. Devus Design have worked on a number of websites for other Unitarian congregations, including Bradford, Hinkley, Scarborough and York, not to mention the new website for the national Unitarian charity, the Unitarian Society for Psychological Studies.



**David Taylor (Stourbridge)**

## A Plaque for George Dawson

The Birmingham Civic Society and 'Everything to Everybody' Project unveiled Blue Plaques commemorating the work of George Dawson and Samuel Timmins in the Shakespeare Memorial Library at the Library of Birmingham on 28 February 2023.

The unveiling took place against the backdrop of a new exhibition from the Jewellery Quarter Research Trust in the Shakespeare Memorial Room celebrating Birmingham's Shakespeare heritage in relation to Dawson and Timmins. The photo shows Professor Ewan Fernie, Fellow and Chair of Shakespeare Studies at the Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham.



George Dawson (1821-1876) was a nonconformist preacher, lecturer and activist with an influential voice in the calls for political and social reform in 19th century Birmingham.

Dawson's views did not fit the orthodoxy of the Baptist church where he was a Minister, so in 1845 he left, followed by much of his congregation, to become minister of the theologically liberal

Unitarian Church of the Saviour, erected for him by his supporters, where "no pledge was required, of minister or congregation; no form of belief was implied by membership; no difference in creed was allowed to bar union in practical Christian work".

He became a widely celebrated lecturer, promoting the "Civic Gospel" and helped to found the Shakespeare Memorial Library. The 'Everything to Everybody' Project has sponsored this Blue Plaque to recognise Dawson's relevance to society today. The plaque will be erected in the Skyline Room, outside the Shakespeare Memorial Library.

## David Taylor (Stourbridge)

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## New Conversation Café

Warwick Unitarians are joining in a partnership of volunteers from the Quakers from the Quaker Meeting almost next door and the Catholics from St Mary Immaculate, just down West Street to offer conversation and friendship to foreign refugees on Monday mornings in the Quaker Meeting House from 10.30 to midday.

From 6<sup>th</sup> March, this collaborative enterprise will be offering help to refugees and others who have arrived in the town but find that they face obstacles because of their relatively poor language skills. English may be recognised the world over as a *lingua franca* and the passport to international communication, but in practice conversational skills are often very difficult to pick up. Many who have travelled to the UK with high expectations find that life here is not as easy for them as they might have hoped because they cannot express themselves as readily as they would like in everyday conversation even if they have studied the formalities of the language at school.

To this end volunteers from the three Church groups, whatever their different approaches to their faiths, have come together to offer a Conversation Café where people can gather for a time to enjoy practising their English with native speakers in an uncritical and encouraging way over a cup of coffee.

The Café will be free and hopefully informal, with young children welcome to come with their parents and a selection of games and activities on hand to facilitate conversation.

**Malcolm Burns (Warwick)**

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## Courage

**Sadly, no-one sent in a piece about courage, so the only contribution is from your Editor. If you have a particular theme you would like to see included in *MU Now*, please contact me.**

The definition of outward courage – being brave, doing something under difficult circumstances, is perhaps the most common understanding of courage in our society today. The image that comes straight away into my mind is that of St George slaying the dragon, or Samwise Gamgee and Frodo Baggins on their long journey into Mordor, in *The Lord of the Rings*, who keep on going, step by painful step, in spite of every peril on the road. Every soldier who goes into battle shows great courage.

But such deeds are not a part of most of our lives in the privileged West. Most of us will live our whole lives without having to undertake a perilous task or endure physical dangers.

But inner courage is something we could all do with more of. It is about living wholeheartedly, about standing up for what we

believe in. In poet David Whyte’s words, it is “to make conscious those things we already feel deeply and then to live through the unending vulnerabilities of those consequences. To be courageous is to seat our feelings deeply in the body and in the world; to live up to and into the necessities of relationship that often already exist, with things we find we already care deeply about: with a person, a future, a possibility in society, or with an unknown that begs us on and always has begged us on.”

Above all, I believe, courage is the willingness to be vulnerable. As Brené Brown writes, “Heroics is often about putting our life on the line. Ordinary courage is about putting our *vulnerability* on the line. In today’s world, that’s pretty extraordinary.” Because it is often so much easier to Do Nothing! To keep your head down and your mouth shut, and to not stand up and speak out in a difficult situation.

We live in a troubled world. Everywhere we look – on Facebook, in the news, there are stories of ordinary people, people just like us, being deprived of their rights, imprisoned, or denied access to benefits, because of the colour of their skin, their sexual orientation, their gender, or their religious faith. Every day, it seems, there is another law which excludes another particular group of people from the full benefits of society. A few years ago, I went to watch the film *I, Daniel Blake*, which really brought home to me what an unequal society we live in, here in the UK. And the so-called “cost of living crisis” – a pretty euphemism for more and more people being pushed below the poverty line, having to choose between food and heating – is here, now.

I believe that sometimes, courage is just taking the first step. The first step which takes us outside our comfort zone, moving us from a place of inaction and “walking by on the other side”, as the Priest and the Levite did in *The Parable of the Good Samaritan*,

towards a path of acting from a place of integrity, standing up for what we believe in, speaking out against evil and injustice, wherever and whenever we encounter it.

It involves being in touch with our feelings, our beliefs; feeling afraid, and doing whatever frightens us anyway. It isn't easy; nothing worthwhile ever is. It involves laying our comfortable lives on the line, being awake to the many injustices in our society, in our daily lives, and daring greatly. Taking a deep breath and being seen. Because it's worth it. Because we are worth it. It's about saying "yes" to life. Not only our own, but that of others.

But sometimes, just sometimes, courage can also be about saying "no". A short while ago, I was invited to take on another role in our Unitarian movement nationally. My first instinct was to say "yes", particularly as the person doing the asking was somebody I like and respect very much.

Yet a little voice in the back of my mind was saying, "Hang on a minute, let's think about this." And I did start to think about the many calls on my time, both paid and unpaid. My ministry, my work for the Worship Studies Course, and my spiritual direction, not to mention my work as a writer! And also the fact that I have a body and a spirit and a marriage, all of which need nourishing. Which takes time and attention.

So I said, "No, I'm so sorry; I can't commit to anything else." It took a lot of courage, as I hate disappointing people. But it was the right thing to do, for me, at this time. And I know that if I had said "yes", I would have ended up feeling depleted and resentful, which would have done no-one any good.

**Sue Woolley**

## MUA Congregations: Times of Services

**This list shows when our Unitarian congregations in the Midlands meet for worship. But please contact the congregation before travelling, in case they are no longer accurate.**

### Every Sunday:

Birmingham	Unitarian New Meeting Church	11.00 am
Cheltenham & Gloucester	Bayshill Unitarian Church	11.00 am
Evesham	Oat Street Chapel	11.00 am
Kingswood	Meeting House	11.00 am
Shrewsbury	Unitarian Church	11.00 am
Warwick	High Street Chapel	4.30 pm

### First Sunday of the Month:

Northampton	Unitarian Meeting House	11.00 am
Stroud Fellowship	The Exchange, Stroud	3.00 pm

### Second Sunday of the Month:

Coventry	Gt Meeting House Unitarian Church	11 am
Cradley	Park Lane Unitarian Chapel	6.30 pm*
Stourbridge	Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel	11.00 am

### Third Sunday of the Month:

Northampton	Unitarian Meeting House	11.00 am
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### Fourth Sunday of the Month:

Coventry	Gt Meeting House Unitarian Church	11 am
Stourbridge	Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel	11.00 am

\*currently in abeyance

## MUA Congregations: Contact Details

Name	Contact	Details
Birmingham		unitariannewmeetingbirmingham@yahoo.co.uk
Cheltenham & Gloucester	Alison Thursfield	01242 254825 thursfieldalison@gmail.com
Coventry	Francesca Rogers	info@coventryunitarians.org.uk
Cradley	Sheila Powell	perconicous24@yahoo.co.uk 01384 480784
Evesham	Jane Couper	01386-839458 janecouper@outlook.com
Kingswood	Maria Govier	07816-159199 maria.heath@icloud.com
Northampton	Aleks Zglinska	07970-785159 aleks.zglinska@gmail.com
Shrewsbury	Fiona Checkley	07487 531 913 shrewsburyunitarians@gmail.com
Stourbridge	David Mearman	01384 376478 davidmearman@hotmail.com
Stroud	Pam Jenkinson	07776 276276 pam.jenkinson58@gmail.com
Warwick	Elaine Nomura	01926 611964 emtnomura@aol.com



**The Summer/Autumn 2023 issue will be published in September.**

**Please may we have your contributions on local matters, and on the theme of “The Environment”**

**by Friday 1st September 2023**

**Thank you!**