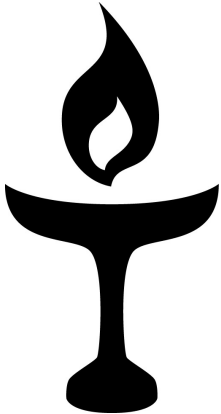


MU NOW



THE MAGAZINE OF
THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN
ASSOCIATION

ISSUE 71 MAY 2024

www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk

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Officers of the Midland Unitarian Association Inc.

THE PRESIDENT

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

VICE PRESIDENT

Ms. Ann Matthews,
40, Preston Street, Shrewsbury SY2 5PG
Tel: 01732-341894 e-mail: annfmatthews@gmail.com

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

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

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

From the Editor

Welcome to the May 2024 issue of *MU Now*. It includes a transcript of President David Taylor's inspiring inaugural address at our AGM, a review of Dr Mark Fox's talk on the same occasion, a fascinating article about trees by Rev Peter Godfrey, as well as the normal District updates, plus some thoughtful contributions on the theme of 'What do you want from your MUA?'.

My thanks to the people 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 2024, is, "Autumn". The deadline for submissions is Friday 6th September 2024.

Please send your contributions to me at revsuewoolley@gmail.com or to 5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN.

THANK YOU!

Sue Woolley

President's Piece



The theme of this issue of *MU Now* is 'What do you want from your MUA?'. We will, of course, all want different things, depending on our own circumstances, the church we attend and how we see the MUA operating in the future. As most of you will be aware by now, thanks to the hard work of Rev. Winnie Gordon of Birmingham New Meeting, the MUA has a new and exciting 'Sustainability Audit' project underway, which should give us as a District, a much needed 'health check', and will enable the MUA to better support our congregations in a more effective way.

For my part, my hopes for the future of the MUA are best summed up by the words of Leonard Cheshire. In August 1945 Leonard Cheshire, an RAF bomber pilot, was an observer at the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima. He went on to found the Cheshire Foundation Homes for the Sick charity for persons with disabilities (now Leonard Cheshire Disability). It is this quote from Leonard Cheshire that for me, sums up what the MUA and all organisations and individuals should strive to be:

"We will find that it is in the going out to help someone whose need is greater than ours that we solve our own problems and become fulfilled as a person; more the unique masterpiece that God wills us ultimately to be".

What I think we do (and I would like to think that we do this well) is offer support to all congregations in the region. Like all effective support, you don't know it's there, until help is needed! Just as we entered lockdown, my own congregation at Stourbridge urgently needed some security gates at our chapel. The MUA

were there to give us prompt financial support to get those gates installed.

Rev. Hugh Warnock, MUA President from 1950-52 and Minister at Walsall, summed up for me what the MUA and its congregations should strive to be: “A Unitarian church is not a church where all think alike, but where all alike think. We have no fixed creed, but come together to help one another search out the truth in freedom and reverence, and to find inspiration to put the truth we discover to work in human life. We assemble prompted by love and duty; to worship God; to reason about the problems of life; to strengthen the will and the spirit of enthusiasm, and to increase love of justice and truth, that we may help to increase righteousness upon the earth”.

Not a bad reason for coming together I think you will agree!

David Taylor

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### **District Minister: May 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. It is a joy to be leading worship in person again in the last few weeks.

By the time you read this, the **Spring Training Day**, on the topic of ‘Artificial Intelligence and Unitarians: Beginning a Discussion’ will have taken place. I hope that all the participants will have learned much from it, and be able to put what they have learned into the context of their own lives and those of their congregations.

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 has already been shared in the relevant issue of *Bits & Pieces*, the monthly news-sheet sent to all congregations, and are no longer current. But at our AGM in March, we were pleased to welcome Peter Flower, organist at Kingswood and Warwick, and prospective ministry student, onto the Executive Committee.

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### **Inaugural Address by David Taylor**

We all have those little things in life that make us happy, those hobbies, which may seem strange to others, but which bring joy to ourselves. Some of you may like morris dancing. Some of you may like collecting bus numbers. Some of you may like bog

snorkling. Some of you, Heavens forbid, may even like ironing! My wife Carolyn and I enjoy poking around in antique shops. Early to mid-20th century ceramics are our thing. Clarice Cliff, Poole, Ruskin, Midwinter etc. Now, if you have ever watched TV programmes like *Antiques Roadshow* or *Flog It*, you will know one thing – the slightest chip or crack devalues the antique.

This is a rule we try and hold to, but to be honest, the best thing about rules is that they are there to be broken.

On the shelf in our lounge at home I have a small pottery vase. It's earthenware and unglazed and has a small Celtic cross on the front. I purchased it possibly 30 years ago on my first visit to Iona. What a casual glance doesn't notice is that its badly cracked. But I love this vase.

I love it because when I show it to people, I make sure it holds a secret. Inside, I keep a small tea light candle. The light is completely invisible apart from where the cracks show a glimmer every now and then.

Our society doesn't much go for cracked pots. We like things perfect – perfect bodies, perfect faces, first class degrees, champions, health and wealth.

The problem is that none of us is really like that. We're only perfect in our frustrated imagination. We know really that were just clay pots - fragile, with plenty of cracks. But it is through these cracks that our own inner light can shine through.

Leonard Cohen put it more lyrically than I could:

“Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in.”

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that they are to be a 'light for the world'. But what sort of light?

There is, for example, the searchlight, whose brightness picks out every detail, leaves nothing hidden, exposes all the dark corners. There are occasions when we are called to be that sort of light, to reveal something in the lives of individuals or of society that must not remain concealed. But these occasions are probably pretty rare. There is something harsh about a searchlight which should make us cautious about using it. In some circumstances it can be a cruel light which bleaches out all shades of colour and blinds the one at whom it is pointed.

There is another sort of light shown to us in the line from the hymn by Newman, *Lead Kindly Light*. Here is a gentle light which illuminates, reveals, guides, but does not set out to expose every nook and cranny. It enables the one on whom it is shone to move forward, shows the hazards on the way, but respects the fact that people are vulnerable in all sorts of ways that the bearers of that light can only guess at. It leaves some things still obscured, because none of us can bear having everything about us exposed to others and still retain a sense of dignity. God does not force us to know everything about ourselves in one fell swoop, but allows us to grow in our knowledge and understanding. We should do the same for others.

I think it is about time we embraced our imperfections.

Don't get me wrong, I do believe that to aim for perfection is useful on occasion. Great things have occurred because of strategic excellence. If we're talking about getting a computer

program right so that it can map the inner workings of a human brain, then it matters. If we're talking about millionths of a degree when aiming a telescope to look at a distant star, then it matters. But in so many of our human endeavors, it is almost impossible to be perfect.

Sometimes our society focuses on perfection to such an extent that we end up with a skewed image of what's possible or what goals we should set, and we become hard on ourselves or others. The other day a customer where I work described to me the way in which managers rank their equally hard working team members by their financial successes and then reward them with unequal bonuses to make them more competitive with one another. The idea that perfection is attainable is confusing, in part because sometimes we do get an A, or a compliment or promotion, and it motivates us further. But in general, aiming to be perfect is both unrealistic and exhausting.

This little story from the Islamic tradition tells it well...

One afternoon, Hanif and his friend were sitting in a cafe, drinking tea, and talking about life and love. "How come you never got married, Hanif?" asked his friend at one point. "Well," said Hanif, "to tell you the truth, I spent my youth looking for the perfect woman. In Cairo, I met a beautiful and intelligent woman, with eyes like dark olives, but she was unkind. Then in Baghdad, I met a woman who was a wonderful and generous soul, but we had no interests in common. One woman after another would seem just right, but there would always be something missing. Then one day, I met her. She was beautiful, intelligent, generous and kind. We had everything in common. In fact she was perfect." "Well," said Hanif's friend, "what happened? Why didn't you marry her?" Hanif sipped his tea reflectively. "Well," he replied, "it's a sad thing. Seems she was looking for the perfect man."

And along with perfect bodies, perfect hair and perfect lives, we can sometimes expect perfect congregations too. They are usually big, are open for coffee mornings, book sales, safe space, refugee, cake making, tai chi workshops. They will have a minister and an administrator, a thriving (young or youngish!) congregation and if you are lucky, a beautiful garden space. We all strive to this of course, but how many of us actually manage to do **all** of this?

I think it is important for all congregations within the fellowship of the MUA to know that it's okay not to be perfect. In fact, in the unlikely event that a congregation is perfect, that means that there is no room for improvement, no room for each individual member of the congregation to blossom and help the congregation to grow.

The scientist Stephen Hawking once said, "One of the basic rules of the universe is that nothing is perfect. Perfection simply doesn't exist.....Without imperfection, neither you nor I would exist"

So let us embrace our imperfect, fragile lives and our imperfect fragile congregations, and let our lights shine.

And to close, a prayer by Shantideva, an 8th century Indian Buddhist monk for the MUA and all its congregations:

May we become at all times, both now and forever

A protector of those without protection

A guide for those who have lost their way

A ship for those with oceans to cross

A bridge for those with rivers to cross

A sanctuary for those in danger

A lamp for those without light

A place of refuge for those who lack shelter

And a servant to all in need.

*Amen*

## What will survive of us is love\*

The afternoon speaker at the 2024 AGM was Dr Mark Fox. He has been researching and writing about topics at the interface of faith, spirituality and religious experience for the last twenty-five years.

The title of his afternoon talk was *The Fifth Love* and was based on his research into experiences with transcendent love. The title was inspired by *The Four Loves*, a 1960 book by C. S. Lewis which explores the nature of love from a Christian and philosophical perspective. Lewis examined the four loves – an idea that in Greek there are four different words for love and Lewis puts them down as: affection, friendship, erotic love, and charitable love. The fifth love of Mark’s talk relates to a ‘higher’ form of ‘divine’ love.

Mark is particularly interested in the theological and philosophical elements and implications of religious and spiritual experience and has made detailed use of the archive of the Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC), currently housed at the University of Wales, Lampeter, in his research and writing. The archive had been started in 1969 by the scientist Sir Alister Hardy, and was for many years housed at Oxford University. Hardy was baptized as an Anglican and he remained one at heart. In later life, his mind drew him to become a member of the Unitarian Church. (Interestingly during the Q&A session, Gavin Lloyd from Oxford recounted his meetings with Hardy at Unitarian services in Oxford.)

Mark gave several examples from the RERC archives involved peoples experiences of transcendent love. This usually, although not exclusively, occurred at times of extreme crisis. In over 100 accounts Mark related how people had felt both overwhelmed and comforted by experiences of being loved by ‘something greater

than themselves’. As love is a core concept in all world religions Mark’s talk shifted love from being an abstract concept to something that can be experienced.

Further details of Mark’s research can be found at: [markfox.co.uk](http://markfox.co.uk)

*\*An Arundel poem by Philip Larkin*

**David Taylor**

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Trees by Peter Godfrey

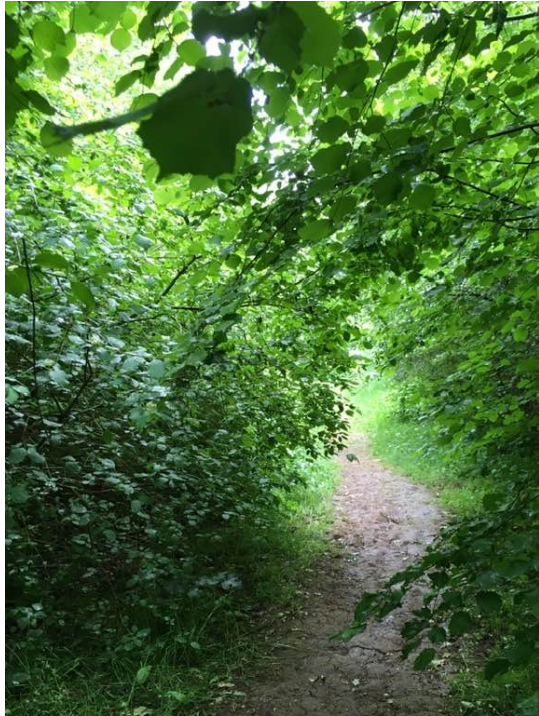
*‘The Lord God made trees spring from the ground, all trees pleasant to look at and good for food’
[Gen. 2:9]*

These are words from the beginning of the second of the Genesis stories about creation. What delightful words they are: ‘ trees, pleasant to look at and good for food’.

In the wonderful poem/story they – trees – are the first thing to be created after man himself. I hope women readers will forgive me for saying ‘man’ and not ‘human beings’, but in this imaginative creation poem trees are imagined as being created before woman. These stories were written by men.

Why an article about trees? I could give hundreds of reasons. One is that I don’t feel qualified to write on the theme of ‘What do you want from the MUA?’ The MUA seems to me, and in my experience, very good to its ministers. Another reason is that trees just seem to me so beautiful at this time of year with their fresh and so varied greens and now, in many cases their glorious blossom. For thousands of people entering and leaving Stroud everyday there is a ride alongside half a mile of trees every other

one of which is now covered in the blossom of varied species of Gloucestershire apple.



Trees in Salcey Forest (image by Sue Woolley)

There is another reason. Almost at the end of April Rev. Maria Curtis took me to the National Trust's Woodchester Cafe in the hills above Stroud. Trees as far as the eye could see!! After a good lunch and a non-stop chat we were in the little hut by the cafe. I was going through the arrangements to hire the mobility scooter for half an hour. Maria was looking at the second-hand bookstall. When I asked Maria if she had found anything good she pointed to Richard Powers' book *The Overstory* and recommended it. I

hadn't heard of this book (I can hear some of you saying 'Shame on you'!) So I bought it – in spite of its weight and length.

To my amazement, when I got home and started reading that day's *Guardian*, I discovered that the four page 'Long Read' that day was all about trees with several mentions of Powers' book, which is all about trees. Powers' prologue depicts a woman sitting against a pine tree and 'The tree is saying things. In words before words...the pine she leans against says: Listen. There's something you need to hear.' So the *Overstory* begins.

In some ways, though probably not intentionally, the *Guardian Long Read* by Daniel Immerwahr takes up the same theme. He starts with some facts about trees. Trees are the world's chief occupant. There are something like eight billion humans on earth, but there are three *trillion* trees, outnumbering us by four hundred to one. They are easy to miss: show a person a photograph of a forest with a doe poking its head out and the person will say 'Oh, a deer'. He says this is called 'plant blindness'. People can confidently name different varieties of dogs yet can't identify an apple tree.

Of course, he says, trees don't draw attention to themselves – apart from occasionally dropping their fruit on the head of a pondering physicist. Books about trees have tended to be a bit boring. In his words 'heavy on serenity, light on plot'. Then he goes on: 'Or at least they were until recently. The German forester Peter Wohlleben's surprise best seller, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, has inaugurated a new discourse on trees which sees them not as inert objects but intelligent subjects. Trees have thoughts and desires, Wohlleben writes, and they converse via fungi that connect their roots 'like fibre-optic internet cables'.

Then, he says, ‘the same idea pervades *The Overstory*, Richard Powers’ celebrated 2018 novel in which a forest scientist upends her field of study by demonstrating that fungi connections ‘link trees into gigantic vast communities’. Immerwahr goes on, ‘Both books share an unlikely source. In 1997 a young Canadian forest ecologist named Suzanne Simard (the model for Powers’ character) published with five co-authors a study in nature describing resources passing between trees, apparently via fungi. Trees don’t just supply sugars to each other, Simard has further argued; they can also transmit distress signals, and can shunt resources to neighbours in need.

Well, one thing has led to another so that some people are even talking of trees being conscious. As if anyone knows what consciousness is!! (That’s my comment...) There is talk – or writings – of trees ‘mothering’ and of cooperating together, of the forest being a ‘wood-wide web’. So having for centuries treated trees as timber we are now being invited to treat them as our kin.

Immerwahr asks, ‘What makes us so eager to ascribe human qualities to the arboreal world? Might we be missing something important when we gaze into the wooden mirror and see only ourselves?’

Inevitably, it seems, some scientists are saying that many claims being made for trees are outstripping the evidence. ‘Let us be frankly human and let the trees be trees’ Santayana said many years ago. To which the reply according to Simard is that what matters is the urgent task of protecting trees, woods and forests. Surely she is right.

I think Immerwahr has his tongue a bit in his cheek when he says that Peter Wohlleben’s book *The Hidden Life of Trees* must not be confused with Colin Tudge’s *The Secret Life of Trees* or Suzanne

Simard’s *The Secret Forest*, to say nothing of Peter Tomkins and Christopher Bird’s book *The Secret Life of Plants*. As the saying goes – please keep up!

It seems pretty clear to me that these books do show that trees and plants are clever in many ways. Some I have already mentioned at least by implication and Immerwahr points to a special ability in which he says that trees excel. This is in their ability as gifted chemists, exhaling and secreting sophisticated compounds to entice, repel or poison their neighbours. He writes, ‘The woodsy sweetness of balsam trees, the tang of pines: these are not perfumes but chemical weapons deployed in an interspecies war. They are insecticides, and there is something softly psychotic in how much we delight in their smells.’

Immerwahr makes several other points. For example, that trees and forests do have their dark side in stories with their witches and wolves, for example. He mentions how long redwoods and the cedars of Lebanon live and says that we should ‘think in the fullness of tree time’. Thinking about trees, he says, widens our horizons and contemplating them should be an exercise in humility ‘we are not everything, and everything is not us’.

All this has reminded me of Karen Armstrong’s writing in *Sacred Nature* where she says, ‘If we want a viable world, we must awaken within ourselves a new reverence for nature’.

How about some homework? Please look up Mary Oliver’s poem that begins

*What can I say that I have not said before?
So I’ll say it again.
The leaf has a song in it.*

and Gerard Manley Hopkins' moving poem *Binsey Poplars*, about the destruction of a group of trees he had loved:

*My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,
Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun,
All felled, felled, are all felled.....
...aftercomers cannot guess the beauty been.*

and/or you could get Paul Robeson singing Joyce Kilmer's *Trees*:

*I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.*

Long ago Ogden Nash warned us when he wrote:

*I think that I shall never see a billboard lovely as a tree
Perhaps unless the billboards fall I'll never see a tree at all.*

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## District Round-Up

### Shrewsbury Unitarians raise money for Send A Child to Hucklow

Thanks to the encouragement from Sonya Richards, a member of the Shrewsbury Unitarian Church and its inspiring Church Administrator, Fiona Checkley. I decided to raise some money for a charity that is close to my heart, Send A Child to Hucklow. I was hoping to raise at least £375 to send at least one child to Hucklow by Easter.

I started in January by asking the congregation to bring second hand clothes in, to sell, and we also had a "guess the weight of a cake" that Nigel made specially for the competition. We raised £130.

Next we decided to hold a Spring Fayre on 23rd March. Many people from the congregation supplied us with articles for a bric-a-brac stall, cakes and preserves for another stall and bottles and chocolates for the tombola stall. It was a roaring success, and I would like to thank everyone who contributed to supplying things for the stalls and also a big thank you to the workers on the day, Albert especially, Sue Lewis, Sue Davies, Jill Ashurst, Ruth Taylor, Sonya Richards, Bronwen Taylor, Fiona Checkley, Marlies Cope and Christine Birtles. We raised £786.14 on the day!!

I mentioned that SACH is close to my heart because I remember when I was in the Unitarian Young People's League, I saw first-hand what a difference it makes to some of these deprived inner city kids.

My brother Ian, a Unitarian minister, used to help out at these special weeks. Some children had never even seen a cow and the comments they made stating that they were getting "three meals a day" made you think. And as a UYPLer at based at my church in Chorlton, Manchester, I was involved from the inception of the Chorlton UYPL Football Club in 1969 which I was part of for over 25 years.

When I moved to Whitchurch in Shropshire 24 years ago, I joined the local football team Whitchurch Alport FC as a coach then as the Chairman, and now their Vice President; a club of over 16 teams. This led onto joining a sub-committee called The Commander Ethelston Cup Competition that raised money for local charities. It is over 120 years old. Having finished our recent competition I asked the committee if they would donate an amount towards my charity, thankfully they were very generous and donated £330.

This raised the total of all the events to a staggering £1246.14, which can now send three children to Great Hucklow.

Thanks once again to all who contributed to a great cause.

**Kim Marchbank-Smith**



**Shrewsbury Unitarian Church has a new Administrator**

I was asked to write a few words to introduce myself as the new Church Administrator at Shrewsbury Unitarian Church. I have recently taken over in the role from Fiona Checkley, who has been here for eight years. Fiona has done an amazing job, taking a lot of work off the committee and developing activities that the church can engage in. I hope to continue this and to develop the work of the church further.



I have been a member of the Church, and a trustee, for 18 years. Before that, I was at Upper Chapel, Sheffield and Lancaster Unitarian Church as a student. My younger years were spent at Norcliffe Chapel, Styal, with Rev Penny Johnson. I hope that as a lifelong Unitarian I have a good understanding of the range of beliefs within the Unitarian movement, what congregation members would

like and need from the Church, and how we fit into regional and national organisations. Over the years I have been a member of the Unitarian Music Society and the Earth Spirit Network. My husband and I also got married in the Church in 2012.

Alongside this role, which is 20 hours/week, I work in environmental consultancy with my husband. I have worked in fieldwork and environmental education and flood management and hydrology and will continue with this work through our own business on a free-lance basis. I am also volunteering with the British Red Cross as an Emergency Response volunteer – this is a new role which will be challenging but should be very rewarding.

I am settling into the job, it helps that I already know the Church. The job is certainly varied and busy! It is a case of juggling many things at once – finances, administration, event management, community links, working with the congregation and the wider community, buildings maintenance, policies and procedures and music. It is very rewarding, and there are so many opportunities for how we could develop the Church’s activities. We host a Food Hub morning each week, concerts and music events, coffee mornings and book sales, a poetry group, the Hmm Squad discussion group, Amnesty and Global Justice, and a local youth theatre group. We have recently taken out more pews so that we have a larger social space at the back of the Church which is accessible. It is also good to be working in Shrewsbury town centre and to be a part of events in the town.

I am enjoying this role, which is allowing me to give more time to the Church, and I am looking forward to developing the role and connecting further with the wider movement in the future.

**Jenni Duffell**



## What Do You Want From Your MUA?

First, an invitation from our District Treasurer:

With the theme of “What do you want from your MUA?” it felt like a good moment for me to reflect and remind everyone why we are here and how we can help. I know we all share in the ideals that the MUA stands for: to support and offer guidance for/to our fantastic and vibrant Unitarian congregations across the Midlands. Truly it is about helping support the great work you all do in fostering a thriving community in your local areas. Hopefully, the MUA supports each congregation's unique needs and wants. You might be thinking, of course we know this, Kieren. But it is important to consider what this looks like – and what you may all be thinking about what you want from the MUA – will be uniquely different for each of you and your congregations – and that rich diversity is something to proudly respond to.

So, what this *could* look like for each of you (hopefully as a reminder) can vary from providing or arranging tailored advice to facilitating training, and financial assistance through grants provided to congregations. But we only know this and what is needed when our congregations reach out for help and support – so this is an open invitation – if you have an idea you want to be considered, your building needs something better than it has today – please reach out. We will help as far as we can.

On a deeper level for me, the MUA's approach is deeply rooted in the belief that strength lies in solidarity; by encouraging congregations to engage in regular District-wide events, they cultivate a sense of belonging and collective purpose. At the District level, part of the reason I took the District Treasurer role, was that strategic financial oversight at this level is instrumental in

enabling congregations to focus on spiritual growth and community outreach, rather than being constrained by not having money that might otherwise hinder progress and flourishing – we are here for you!

The MUA's support extends beyond the tangible, I know we all want to ensure that the light of Unitarianism continues to shine brightly in the West Midlands. We all have our part to play in that and your District remains steadfastly committed to helping any and every way it can. The aim is to help you to be the best guardians of what we have and ensure you are furnished with the tools to share it proudly with the communities we serve.

**Kieren Mardle-Moss**

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Second, a challenge from Rev Peter Hewis:

A five-year plan

The late Principal Kenworthy of the Unitarian College once told us, “You won’t know whether you are failing or succeeding until you have been in a church for five years.” Throughout my ministries I have taken his advice and kept the thought of five years in my mind. Therefore, what I would like from the MUA is a five-year plan. What that plan is must be up to the Executive Committee to decide, but here are a few suggestions.

1. Only use the income from investments so that the funds don’t run out.
2. Pay for a building and energy survey in every one of our churches.
3. Make sure that every congregation has some local Ministerial or Lay Leadership.

4. Support publicity schemes for every congregation, for example up to date notice boards and web pages plus leaflets on our faith in every building.
5. Create libraries of worship materials in every church as a resource for the members. (Yes, I know you can download material from computers but it's not the same!)

That's enough to be going on with, but why do I suggest these things? It's from experience and here are a few examples. Years ago, I visited a church in Yorkshire during August, on the notice board was a poster for their pantomime that had taken place in February, but no one had bothered to remove the poster! Another church had dry rot and it was caused by leaking gutters and downspouts because no maintenance had been carried out for years. One church had massive energy bills but had no roof insulation and a very inefficient heating system. Then in our own District several congregations have had no local regular Ministerial or Lay Leadership for years...

Peter Hewis

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Finally, a reflection about our forthcoming Sustainability Audit:

**A Time of Renewal and Hope**

It is fitting that we have just celebrated the Pagan festival of Beltane, as a time of renewing energy, thanksgiving and hope, as our world once more turns towards the warmer months of Summer. So I thought it appropriate to reflect on how we might be, how we might act, as congregations, and as a District, as we prepare to undertake the Sustainability Audit in the second half of this year. Which the District is hoping will be able to offer some constructive ideas for how our congregations might renew themselves.

In a lovely reading from the Unitarian hymnbook, *Songs for Living*, Vincent B. Silliman has some wonderfully aspirational ideas of what our faith might mean to us – and not only to us, but to our local communities. Here is part of it:

“Let religion be to us a voice of recurring challenge to the best we have and may be; let it be a trumpet call to action that is utterly generous. Let religion be to us the dissatisfaction with things that are, which bids us serve more eagerly the true and the right. Let religion be the sorrow that opens for us the way of sympathy, understanding and service to suffering humanity. Let religion be to us ideals that are true and right. Let religion be to us hope and purpose, discovering for us opportunities to express our best through daily tasks and associations.”

I believe that our Unitarian communities can both reflect and inhabit these high ideals. And I also believe that our ability to do so could make all the difference in the weeks and months ahead. All our congregations suffered losses during the Covid pandemic and few are back up to their pre-Covid numbers. I am afraid that the long-term fall-out from the coronavirus will continue to be both difficult and complex to deal with. Not only the effect on people who have lost loved ones, although that of course is the worst, but also the number of jobs lost, companies closing down, has led to great changes in our economy, and not for the better. Not to mention the ongoing emotional and psychological effects that being in lockdown, in isolation, for so long has had on too many people.

So we need all the kindness, all the compassion, that we showed to each other during that time, to work together towards a better, more compassionate society. Because the shocking truth is, that although humankind suffered greatly during the pandemic, the rest of creation has thriven. Seas and rivers were less polluted, the

air was cleaner, and the knock-on effects of those benefits on the natural world have been widespread. We need to build on this breathing space “now it is all over”, rather than going back to our old polluting ways. As I’ve said many times before, climate change is a reality, and time is running out. What can your congregation do to be greener?

We will also need hope and all the “renewing energy” we can lay our hands on, in order to undertake our Sustainability Audits and to make them a positive experience, which leads to renewed hope and growth, rather than depression and decline.

We also need to look beyond our small communities and see the widespread fears of the poor and dispossessed in our towns and cities, in our wider communities. fear of unemployment and poverty, fear of homelessness and bankruptcy, fear of a future without hope.

We may be small in number, but everyone can do \*something\* to help those worse off than themselves. Whether it is regularly donating food to the local food bank, offering a warm and welcoming space to all, or simply buying an extra cup of coffee when we next visit a coffee shop and giving it to the next homeless person we see. Every town and city has a network of local charities who are battling to help those in need – why not get in touch with them and see what your congregation can do to help?

In the words of Carolyn McDade’s wonderful hymn, “And I’ll bring you hope, when hope is hard to find, and I’ll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.” May it be so for us all, in the weeks and months to come.

**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<br>Cheltenham &<br>Gloucester | Unitarian New Meeting Church | 11.00 am              |
| Evesham                                  | Bayshill Unitarian Church    | 11.00 am              |
| Kingswood                                | Oat Street Chapel            | 11.00 am <sup>1</sup> |
| Shrewsbury                               | Meeting House                | 11.00 am              |
| Warwick                                  | Unitarian Church             | 11.00 am              |
|                                          | 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 <sup>2</sup> |
| Stourbridge | Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel   | 11.00 am             |

### Third Sunday of the Month:

|             |                         |          |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------|
| Northampton | Unitarian Meeting House | 11.00 am |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------|

### Fourth Sunday of the Month:

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

<sup>1</sup> No service on 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays <sup>2</sup>currently in abeyance

## MUA Congregations: Contact Details

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

## Unitarian Society for Psychological Studies Annual Conference

**When:** Saturday 28th September 2024

**Times:** 10am - 4pm

**Where:** Warwick Unitarian Chapel, 31 High Street, Warwick,  
CV34 4AX

### Tickets:

£15 (payable on the door - cash only)

or in advance by online payment to USPS Lloyds Bank account.  
Sort Code: 30-94-74 Account No: 00836674

### Speakers:

**Prof Rob Gandy:** *Haunted Roads*

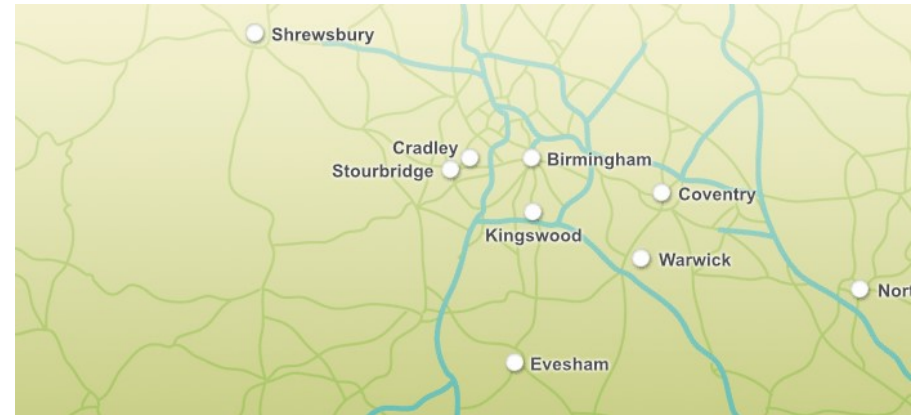
**Dr Mark Fox:** *Scent from a Distance: Olfaction, Premonitions & Preternatural Knowing*

**Alan Murdie:** *White Lady Apparitions: Spectres or signs from the Cosmos?*

**Everyone welcome!**

Refreshments included - Bring packed lunch.

Further details from: [infousps@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:infousps@yahoo.co.uk)



**Issue no. 72 will be published in September 2024**

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

**by Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

**Thank you!**