



Chorlton Unitarians Newsletter May 2016



Minister's Musings

I find this a strange thing to be writing to you. I have been at Chorlton for nearly 10 years now, as a member of the congregation, worship leader, Lay Pastor and Minister with a gap for Ministry training.

In that time the congregation has grown and changed and we are on a much stronger footing. My work has been very developmental and I feel the congregation needs a different type of leader now; one with a vision for consolidation and how the congregation might move forward.

I am writing to let you know that I have accepted a call to be Minister of York Unitarians. The time is right, I feel, for me and my family to make a move. My final day is 25th July.

It has been a great joy and honour to be allowed to walk alongside you in your life journeys and I have learnt so much from you.

I will be sorry to leave you all. It is a strange business this Ministry thing! Thank you all for your care and support of me and your tolerance of my quirks. It has been very rewarding to walk this journey with you and I wish each and every one of you well as you continue with fresh leadership and new insight and skills, continuously remaking this, your community of faith.

I can be contacted on 0161 224 5289 or by e-mail on revnickyj@icloud.com

New Book in the Library

Transgender people are becoming more visible in our communities, the news and our congregations. Unitarians want to be

accepting of Trans people along with Lesbian, gay and bi people, but they might find themselves floundering in a sea of considerable ignorance. You might have read some of the publicity around Denton Unitarian Church offering baptisms for Transgender people and wondered what your attitude would be.

This new book “Dear Cis people” is written and drawn by Sophie Labelle. It is a comic strip but it’s not funny. The main characters are two transgender children who discuss the issues society has with them with an innocence but also, some might say, an exceptional vocabulary. In the process we learn of some of their difficulties, with names, filling in forms, which toilet to use and how old you should be before you start treatment.

There is a whole vocabulary which goes with gender issues which you might be unaware of if you are over forty. This book helps you to get your head around this vocabulary and to gain insight and develop empathy. Cis people are those who identify as having the gender they were assigned at birth.



Sophie is Canadian and her books are also in French and have been translated into other languages. There are colouring books and

stickers as well as a couple of books in this range which can be found for sale at assignedmale.etsy.com. The cartoons can be viewed online at www.assignedmale.com.

I have, to be honest, found this book pretty challenging and confrontational. It can be quite aggressive in confronting what it sees as cisgender privilege. And, if you have never thought about this, it can be difficult. Be prepared to allow for a change of mind, a seeing through another lens. Read this book, learn, grow. It will enlighten you. It's only a slim volume in landscape form and it's in our church library now

You can borrow books from the library if you fill in your details in the black notebook on the shelves. We are keen that people make use of this resource, so don't forget, pop in to the vestry before or after a service and see what we've got - a wide ranging

collection of new and old works on Unitarianism, religions, philosophy. We even have a small children's section. It's a great resource to help you plan a service too.

N.J.

GA Report - April 2016 Mary R Crumpton

I wasn't sure I was going to make it to the GA this year. I was still recovering from illness and, particularly at the start of the week; I had to keep disappearing off to rest.

I started out with a plan to attend mostly just the events where my vote was needed, but I am pleased to report that by the end of the week I was well enough, just about, to manage an all-night drinking/philosophising session with, amongst others, our Minister and Secretary!

Learning Point 1 – Unitarians know how to party!

The week included a number of interesting talks. I particularly enjoyed the John Relly Beard Lecture: about the way faith and religion is depicted in the cinema. It was a thought-provoking look not just at films whose subject matter is overtly religious, but also at films that capture moments of spiritual insight in subtler ways. The first clip was, predictably, from Monty Python's "Life of Brian," but other films mentioned included "Son of Man", "If..." and "Suffragette." Films and the arts provide a good lens through which to view and explore our contemporary spirituality.

Learning Point 2 – It might be fruitful for us to start a film club; watching and discussing films and documentaries that might provoke spiritual reflection and/or social action.

Another day, I decided to give the Psychological Society a whirl and attended their talk “Reached by the Real: What can we know from religious and spiritual experience?”

We were presented with some interesting accounts and reflections on spiritual experiences that manifest as an extraordinary sense of deep knowing and clarity, and it really made me think about the nature of knowing and the nature of spiritual experience.

Learning Point 3 – Unitarians are *deep* thinkers – fab!

On to the “practical nitty gritty” of the week – there was a range of plenaries and discussions about our Unitarian faith and where it is going, and we voted on a number of motions.

One of my lasting memories of the week will be the discussions that came out of a “Vision to Action” strategy document compiled by the Executive Committee – “next steps towards realising the vision of our future” - which, following various discussions, the meeting voted to support.

The first “Reaching Outwards” step in the document was to “develop a comprehensive response to explain our identity” – and there was talk about slogans, straplines, and making it clearer what Unitarianism is about, as well as making it seem inviting and inclusive to people from a variety of backgrounds.

I put the cat among the pigeons early on in the week by raising the issue of our name, “Unitarians and Free Christians.” This sticky subject has come up before, but no-one was really talking about it in the context of the

strategy document, and I felt it needed raising again.

I stood up and suggested that we really needed to ditch references to being Christian in our name and promotional materials, because it stops us seeming inclusive:

I feel that whilst Christianity is of course an important part of our heritage, there are many of us (a majority perhaps?) that do not really identify as Christian. And Unitarians now welcome, and count among our members, people of many other faiths too. So, singling out Christianity for a mention in our name seems inappropriate to me for the 21st Century.

Lots of people approached me afterwards to tell me enthusiastically that they agreed with me, but I was also accused by some of trying to alienate or ditch Christian Unitarians. No conclusions were reached, but by the end of

day two at my first GA I had apparently caused such a stir that everyone seemed to know my name – I haven't yet worked out if this is a good thing or not. I also made the rash promise to propose a motion on the matter at next year's GA (if my congregation supports me in this), and thus spent one happy evening in Birmingham sat in my hotel room drafting a suggested rewording of the start of the constitution.

Learning Point 4 – If you want to slip under the radar and quietly go about your business un-noticed at your first GA meeting, try not to accidentally cause a diplomatic incident when handed a microphone, or via twitter.

During the week there were 5 key motions we voted on, all passed with significant majority.

These were:

- The GA will convert from an Unincorporated Association to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.
- There were some small constitutional alterations to do with terms of office of the Executive Committee.
- A privacy motion, urging the government to amend its “Investigatory Powers Bill” in line with recommendations from “Liberty,” the civil rights organisation, which include: respecting personal data, having a judge authorise surveillance requests and fair/open international data sharing laws.
- A motion on Syria, calling fellow Unitarians to respond with compassion and generosity to the “Clara Barton Red Cross Interfaith Emergency appeal” for medical aid, food and shelter for the

millions of victims and refugees of the civil war in Syria.

- A Climate Change motion, which for me felt the most significant one, calling on fellow Unitarians to make changes to personal lifestyle and at congregational level to measure and reduce our carbon footprints.

Having already acquired my reputation as a troublemaker, I cemented this reputation by adding another accidentally controversial tweet to the event's hashtag stream just after we had passed the climate change motion.

It said “#GAUK16 has voted YES to act on climate change, SO can we look forward to vegan meals and electronic (rather than paper) meeting documents for #GAUK17?”

That tweet also prompted considerable discussion later in the day, mostly in favour I

am pleased to report, though as yet I have had no response from the GA meeting organisers.

I was glad also to have the opportunity to recommend to people bulb.co.uk who are currently the UKs cheapest 100% green electricity supplier (and even do green gas too – a first as far as I am aware).

Learning Point 5 – Unitarians love a good debate, and feel strongly about both social action and environmental action.

Within the Unitarians there are a number of groups who meet at various times during the year. I have already mentioned the Psychological Society. And I discovered that there were two groups to choose from targeted at women – the “Women’s League” and the “Unitarian Women’s Group.” I jokingly asked if they were like the two groups in the

“Life of Brian” film: “The Judean People’s Front” and “The People’s Front of Judea.”

I learned that the Women’s League are a bit like the WI, whereas the Unitarian Women’s Group are more feminist in their outlook. I felt more drawn to the latter, having reassured myself I wouldn’t have to burn my bra, and I thoroughly enjoyed the excellent talk they hosted.

It was given by Kirstie McEwan, a post-op transsexual woman talking about her journey of transition to womanhood. She reminded us that being a woman was about the gender a person identifies most with being female, rather than about a person’s biological sex.

During the questions after the talk, I was pleased to hear that some Unitarian churches have been performing “re-baptisms” for transgendered people. And I was glad also

to be able to take the opportunity to point out that my wonderful minister at Chorlton has agreed to do a polyamorous commitment ceremony (wedding) for me and my partner John next year.

Learning Point 6 - Unitarians are leading the way, again.

As a result of my comments at the end of Kirstie's talk, it has been suggested that I should be the Women's group speaker next year, and talk about my journey to an openly polyamorous lifestyle – watch this space...

Other groups that caught my attention were the Penal Affairs panel, who work with those in prisons, and did an excellent interactive session on the future of privacy; the Earth Spirit Group, who are setting up local groups to celebrate the wheel of the year; and the Visibility Strategy Group, who hosted a discussion about the challenges all

congregations face in raising our public profile.

Inevitably the challenge of coming up with a snappy response to the question “What are Unitarians then?” came up repeatedly. And, having listened to the words and phrases which I heard most, I wrote down a suggested slogan myself, which I shall end with.

But first, my overall feelings about GA week – it was great to go along and lovely to be around so much positivity. I think that there are some things that need to change within the organisation, but overall there is much to be celebrated. And everyone should come along with me next year to experience a GA week for yourselves.

To end then, back to the question,

“What are Unitarians?”

I suggested: “Unitarians are a community of seekers, sharing compassionate wisdom from all traditions.”

And, it’s a community I feel glad to be a member of – and I thank you all for your part in that.

Mary R Crumpton, April 2016

What's On Nationally

Saturdays in June -WB Yeats Poetry Festival
at Unitarian Chapel Padiham

<https://www.unitarian.org.uk/civicrm/event/info?id=242&reset=1>

18 Jul - 22 Jul 2016 Unitarian Discovery Week
at Hucklow. Exploring Personal, Spiritual
and Geographical Journeys'

Fri 05 Aug - Mon 08 Aug 2016 Unitarian
Music Society Dido and Aeneas at Hucklow

Fri 21 Oct -Sun 23 Oct 2016 Unitarian
Women's Group

Fri 25 Nov - Sun 27 Nov 2016 Unitarian
Association of Lay Ministry Conference

For a wide listing of Unitarian events around
the UK check out

<https://www.unitarian.org.uk/get-involved/events>

Dates for your Diary

Until 29th May Unturned Stones Art and poetry exhibition –part of Chorlton Arts Festival

26th May Chorlton Unitarian Church Committee meeting

June

Sunday 5th Interfaith Minister Sue Cockerill with Collection of goods for Samos refugees

Tuesday 7th 7.30pm Cross Street Manchester District Association –Campus ministry

July

Sunday 10th Farewell Service with Rev Nicky Jenkins followed by bring and share lunch

Where to find us

Facebook page: Chorlton Unitarian Church

Website www.chorltonunitarians.org

Twitter

Chorlton Unitarian Church
Rear of Regency Court Flats
Wilbraham Rd,
Chorlton-cum-Hardy,
M21 9LB

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