



Celebrating Christmas

At our first service in December we will start to light the Advent candles as we look forward to celebrating the Christmas season. Christmas means different things to different people and although it is described as 'merry' some people do not experience such joy. We hope everyone coming to our services during December will find peace, hope and solace. There will be the usual services on Sundays at 10.45 as well as extra ones (see page 6)

Our Candlelit Carol Service will be held on Saturday 16th December, starting at 6pm. All are welcome to this very Unitarian and individual service of readings (from a variety of sources), poems, singing, music and carols, all in the special light of the candles in the candelabra above us and candles on the box pews. In the morning of the Saturday, volunteers bring greenery and decorate the church, which all helps create a beautiful atmosphere. Please let Lewis know as soon as possible the details of any readings or other contributions you are making for the Carol Service so that he can plan the order. We will also need contributions please of mince pies, etc. for refreshments after the service.

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Now the Work of Christmas Begins

When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with their flocks, the work of Christmas begins: to find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner, to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among the people, to make music in the heart.

Howard Thurman

This is the Season – by Jacob Trapp

“This is the season when the child in the heart of all of us awakens and the embers of long forgotten dreams are blown into flame.

The ramp of the Legions is stilled; the Caesars lie in dust, but the light from that humble stable shines warm and bright.

Something old and almost lost amid the clutter of the years is calling from the skies and across the fields of snow.

The night winds are stilled and in the darkened heavens the stars foretell of lengthening days and the birth of spring after the winter’s cold. This is the sign that the light of hope, which shines in the dimness of our broken dreams, will never fade or die.

O stretch your hands and with the simple trust of the child, grasp another’s hand and walk the way together.

Though the darkness press in upon us and the promise of Christmas comes like the echo of music upon the wind,

Let our hearts remember that loveliness, that light.”

Annual General Meeting

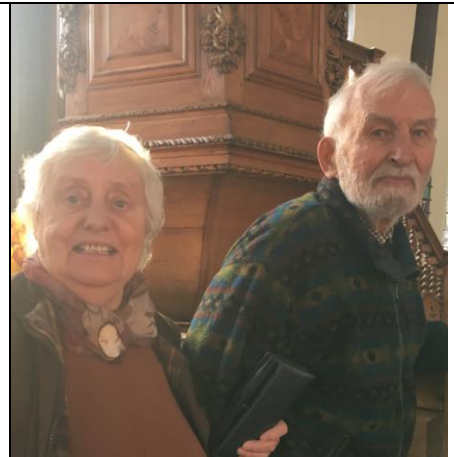
We held our AGM on Sunday 12th November when the three trustees standing for re-election were voted back. So Ann Baeppler, Riena Jackson and Tessa Forsdike will rejoin as trustees. The meeting received and accepted the reports (full details in the Annual Report which was sent to all members and is available to any attenders by asking our secretary Riena Jackson). Our financial situation is safe, although we expect to be seeking substantial funding for the repair and restoration work needed on the Meeting House. The meeting voted to continue to support the Meeting House as our chosen charity throughout 2018. We know that each person has their own favourite charity which they support and are very happy for people to volunteer to hold a service or to organise any fundraising for other charities during the year - please just contact a trustee with the details.

St Cecilia Service

St Cecilia is the patron saint of music – and this gave us another excuse for a service filled with our own choices of music and music related readings. Thank you to all those who sang, read, chose or played music at our St Cecilia Service on 19th November – here are some of you around the organ after the service –



On the same Sunday Rosemary and Ivan celebrated their 57th wedding anniversary – congratulations to them both!



Thank you Rosemary

At our AGM on 12th November I omitted to mention that, due to circumstances beyond her control, Rosemary Hamilton has regrettably had to resign her long-standing trusteeship. I know that Rosemary will continue to contribute to the life of the Meeting House in all sorts of ways and is also fortunately willing to continue as Warden, so she will still be handling all the Meeting House/Upper Room lettings - but I wanted to express our appreciation of all she has done over the years as a trustee, not least of which was organising the sitters during the Summer openings. Apologies and thanks from Ann Baeppler on behalf of us all.

Thinking around the Sexual Abuse Scandals #MeToo

We at the chaplaincy team at the University of Suffolk have been exploring what we might do together cooperatively. We have agreed to pilot a new discussion group for students to explore big issues of the day, and give our faith's response to said issues. The decision was made to begin with the most fraught and challenging subject facing us today: the eruption we have seen of women coming forth to report cases of sexual abuse and/or misconduct, as the media has focused invariably upon prominent individuals in Hollywood and in politics. As I have been asked to write an article for our Ipswich Unitarian newsletter, I can use this opportunity to begin unpacking what my response to this thorny issue might look like. I'll begin by making a few obvious points. First, there is no official 'Unitarian' response to this issue.

Though, as a Unitarian minister, it should be possible for me to articulate a nuanced response which encapsulates the spirit of the community that I represent. Secondly, and even more obviously, I am responding to this issue as a man. I believe this should be stated, as one can always rightly critique a male response to such an issue as being inadequate, as I can only have a partial vantage point on this issue. All I can say is that I know my limitations in this regard. Thirdly, it must also be recognised that this is an issue which understandably evokes a gut response, which may cause us to recall personal experience of sexual misconduct. The fact that this issue reaches into everyone's lives makes it all the more visceral to us. Watching the news we move from story to story, enticed and repelled in equal measure by our outrage.

Unitarian meetings are unique among religious communities in that we have at least two modes of operation. We are both a spiritual family and a context in which we expect to be challenged and confronted with ideas and perspectives outside our comfort zone. As far as religious communities go, this second point makes us quite unusual. Most religious communities have quite a clear *modus operandi*. People are drawn towards their religious tribe, comforted by the fact that they are gathered with people who will advance the beliefs and social mores of that tribe. Unitarianism, ideally speaking, does not work in this way. We expect to encounter people within our community with religious, political, and cultural beliefs at odds with our own. It would be sad if this were not the case. The trouble is that we often fall foul of the intellectual fallacy *reductio ad absurdum*, taking logical arguments

to their extreme. If we should welcome all, despite their opinions, then why not racists, Nazis, or fundamentalists? Should their voice not be just as legitimate as our own? My opinion is categorically no! But why?

Our religious forebears turned away from the religious orthodoxy of their day. They chose to think for themselves and take the road less travelled. This eschewing of orthodoxies is, I think, the most significant aspect of our religion. Orthodoxy relates to tribal modes of thinking, taking on predetermined belief systems and mapping those beliefs onto the world around us. We are so naturally tribal in our thinking, it is incredibly difficult to not do this, not just in the realm of religion, but in all spheres of our lives.

Amongst such pre-packaged ways of framing the world, counter-intuitively it is those at the more liberal end of the spectrum which can be the most pernicious within communities like ours. The reason for this is that the majority of us are liberals, and so those are the tribes we are most likely to fall into in an unexamined way. Wanting to signal our tribal allegiance to liberal ideals, these are the orthodoxies we are most likely to espouse without due consideration. The reason the majority of us are liberals is because of the strong correlation between people being open to new experiences and liberalism. This correlation is well attested to within the field of psychology.

It's with all this in mind that I turn to the current issue of our day - sexual abuse levelled primarily against women. It seems reasonable to assume that what has been uncovered over the last few months in Hollywood and within the political arena is an indicator of the sexual abuse prevalent within society more broadly. Wherever there are communities of people, particularly where there is a power imbalance at play, there seem to be cases of sexual abuse against women and/or minors, whether they have been uncovered yet or not. It goes without saying that sexual relationships between men and women in our modern world are, at the best of times, fraught with difficulty, for the simple reason that intimacy requires some amount of risk. I am yet to meet the person who has not, to one degree or another, been harmed in the sexual arena, as they have attempted to manoeuvre issues of sexuality in human behaviour, torn as society is between advocating sexual liberation and deep

Thinking around the sexual abuse scandals – cont.
anxiety around the abuse that might be perpetuated against those whom society deems vulnerable. As such, society frames these issues in an uncontained way, chaotically lurching from liberal to authoritarian attitudes. Indeed, these issues are so complicated that one struggles to sufficiently communicate around these topics even within the confines of intimate interpersonal relations, let alone upon the superficial public stage.

A few days ago, waiting by the newsstand in Sainsburys, I was flicking through a few of the tabloid papers. One of the headlines, using all the most inflammatory words possible, was breaking a news story about a predatory politician. At the bottom of the page was a picture of a young boy in choir dress. The implication was evident. Reading on however, I learned that the boy in the picture was not a victim as the headline may have suggested, but rather a picture of the accused as a young boy. The actual story was an accusation made by an aide of his that he had allegedly made an unsolicited sexual advance towards her. A couple of pages after this story, there were all the usual long-lens photographs of half-dressed celebrities on beaches trying to enjoy their holidays. The hypocrisy is evident, and yet society is blind to it. Culture is increasingly becoming an infantile delusion, a child's dreamscape, ignorant of the turbulent reality of people's psychic states, and the chaotic sexual arena beneath the surface with all the impulses therein. We're left framing all of these issues from a state of profound ignorance. Surrounding this entire issue there is a pre-set vocabulary, endless propaganda, an orthodoxy if you like. Contravening this orthodoxy or framing any of these issues in a way which does not accord with this pre-set vocabulary is deeply taboo. An example of this is the way the media frames sexual abuse cases. One cannot speak of degrees of severity. There is no language to draw out such a distinction, though clearly such distinctions do exist. As far as the media is concerned, you are either a predatory individual or not. There is no accounting for humanity's complexity. Evidently there is a serious problem in society. Hateful crimes of assault or rape are utterly abominable crimes for which individuals should be severely punished. The existence of such crimes requires us to be vigilant and careful, given that it reveals just how messed up everyone is on the inside. The trouble is that we push away nuance, it is dealt with by invoking shame. The trouble is the false culture which has been built up around this issue. Are we

striving towards a culture in which individuals can operate as their own moral agents? Or are we aiming for an authoritarian culture, in which all human interaction is regulated, in which fear underlies all human interaction? Lewis Connolly - Minister

Flying Scotsman by Needham Lake



Paulette and Riena's quiet meditative walk by Needham Lake was disturbed one Saturday by the passing of the Flying Scotsman and a crowd of train enthusiasts. Here is Paulette waving to the passengers.

Shabbat Service

"How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places O Israel", so started the Shabbat service held on 18th November 2017 by the Liberal Jewish community in our dwelling place, the Ipswich Unitarian Meeting House. Beverley Levi, who had organised this service for Interfaith Week had attended the Meeting House before and had been struck by the resemblance of the Meeting House layout to synagogues. A few of us attended the service and followed the texts in English, which were chanted and read in Hebrew by a young Rabbi. There was a lot of text: praising God in psalms and readings from the Torah including the story of Jacob deceiving his father to get the blessing which was intended for Esau. In his final word the Rabbi spoke about similarities between the Liberal Jews and Unitarians, and thanked us for being allowed to use the Meeting House. Leaving the service, I contemplated how our movement has its roots in Judaism, but how much we have liberated ourselves from this single view and have moved on in time with global developments in philosophies and science. Riena Jackson

Apartheid

At the entrance to the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg you pass a calm pond with a quotation from Nelson Mandela carved into the wall – *'To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.'*

June 1999

This positive message is one to hold onto as you go into the building. Allocated tickets randomly, each visitor is labelled either Blankes/White or Nie Blankes/ non White, so the choice of access gate is determined for you. It is such a token experience, but it sets the scene for the reality of the horrors depicted inside as you follow the history of the rise and fall of apartheid.

There are 22 exhibition areas, designed by a multi disciplinary team of curators, film makers, historians and designers. The exhibition leads you through a powerful and emotional journey, one which I kept reminding myself was history made in my lifetime. Apartheid developed out of a policy of racial segregation which was officially set in 1910 – led mainly by Jan Smuts and JBM Hertzog, key politicians at the time. It classified people into one of four groups – 'native'; 'coloured'; 'Asian' or 'white' and this classification on your identity document determined where you could live, work, travel, go to the toilet ... Violent protests grew in 1959 and in March 1960 the police fired on a crowd in Sharpeville, killing at least 69 people and wounding many more. Organised resistance went underground. Life for black people in the South Africa of the 1960s was very different from the prosperity boom enjoyed by the whites.

The museum charts the political unrest, the rise of black consciousness, the horrors of political executions and of those tortured to death too. My companion on my visit to the museum had lived through all this in Johannesburg, but as a white woman. She shared the story of a college friend who was politically active being killed, along with her baby, by a parcel bomb sent to her by the Government. The exhibit of nooses hanging from the ceiling and representing the people who died in prison is particularly thought provoking.

From June 1976, South Africa's youth became more active in the resistance to apartheid. Violence was part of life, even after Nelson Mandela's release on 11th February 1990 and during the negotiations which finally led to the National Peace Accord, signed in September 1991. All those stages of history are marked with evidence from film footage and photographs through the election in 1994 and the work of the



Truth and Reconciliation Board, to the new constitution of South Africa.

As a teenager in the UK, I had been aware of the violence, the injustice and the fight against apartheid, but had felt completely bewildered by it all. I was horrified to hear about the burning tyres used as an execution 'necklace' to kill informers and it had seemed to me to be incomprehensible how one person could contemplate, let alone execute another human being in this terrible way. Walking through this museum, I came a step closer to understanding how desperate people were then, how the fight for justice might lead to such extreme measures.

We did not have enough time to explore everything in the museum, but maybe it is not possible to absorb all that horror and history in one visit. My thoughts and dreams were affected for days and weeks after I returned to the UK. I hold on to the truth that apartheid in South Africa is now history and no longer part of our present.

I travelled to Johannesburg in October this year for work and found the chance to visit the Apartheid Museum on my day off. I recommend it to everyone – but go prepared to think deeply and to examine your conscience afterwards.

Tessa Forsdike

<http://www.apartheidmuseum.org>

A meditation group called "Some Time to Be" meets in the evening in the Upper Room on the first Thursday of the month. It is led by Ann Baepler who has done an interfaith ministry training. The meditations are designed to offer an oasis of peacefulness and are fully guided, though some past experience of meditation would be useful. For more information contact Ann on 01473 327089.

Helping the Homeless

At our last Trustees' meeting Tessa Forsdike suggested that we might be able to help in some way with the problem of homelessness which manifests "on our doorstep", i.e. people occasionally rough sleeping in the Meeting House grounds. Some churches are in a position to offer beds for the Ipswich Winter Shelter which we are not able to do, but we can help by supporting the Tiffers Bus Shelter which offers beds in a converted double-decker bus. In particular they need rucksacks and small bottles of toiletries (like the ones we all pick up in hotels). Please leave these on the bench near the hymn books in the Meeting House and I will then deliver to the Tiffers shop, or alternatively you can take them direct to the shop which is on the corner of Tacket Street & Upper Orwell Street. Thank you.

Ann Baeppler

St Elizabeth Hospice

As has become a tradition in this congregation, all fundraising contributions in December are for the benefit of our local hospice.

On the 3rd December the Christmas Bits & Bobs Stall will be filled with a display of all the interesting, delectable, unusual and useful gifts for you to give for a present ... or presents! So please make sure the table is empty before you leave!

On 17th December after the service, there will be mince pies, both alcoholic and non alcoholic mulled punch plus the usual draw for a home-made Dundee cake. Maybe someone will bring another prize? This year the hospice fundraisers have suggested we wear our Christmas jumpers or those Christmas hats? Then we can donate for the privilege. We don't suggest you go out to buy a Christmas one, you could just trim up any jumper.

Please support all our fundraising. Thank you.

Linda King and Malcolm Hawes

Happy birthday in December to

Ray Seal on 12th, Carol Gibbs on 26th and John Hamilton on 30th

4Cs – the social side of our Meeting

The 4Cs is the group of people who plan, support and organise the social activities for the year. It is an informal group and anyone is welcome to come and contribute their ideas. The next meeting will be on Wednesday 6th December at 7.30pm at the home of Beryl Beech – 34 Ivy Street, Ipswich

Services – every Sunday at 10.45 unless otherwise stated

3rd December – first Sunday of Advent – we light the candles at each service of Advent.

8th December (Friday) – 8pm – for the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

10th December – Bodhi Sunday

16th December – (Saturday) at 6pm – Carol Service

22nd December (Friday) Taizé service

28th January – Membership service and lunch afterwards – please bring a contribution to share

Events –

15th December – Quaker film night – showing 'Quartet' from 7pm.

10th January – 7 pm to 9.30pm 'Existentialism Unplugged' at the Quaker MH, discussion led by Ant Wooding <https://www.facebook.com/events/142036743227941>



Our Christmas tree at St Mary's Church – do visit!

Contacts

Contributions for the next newsletter to Tessa please before the deadline of Wednesday 24th January 2018 – to ipswichunitarian@gmail.com or post to 48 Crabbe Street, Ipswich IP4 5HS

To contact our Secretary, Riena Jackson, ring 01473 210064/email mjack76748@aol.com

To contact our Minister, Lewis Connolly, ring 01473 422528/email revdlewisconnolly@gmail.com

Thought for the month/s

My idea of Christmas, whether old fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that? Bob Hope