



Newcastle Unitarians
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Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians
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16 November 2021

Hello

Updates on what's happening at Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians

As you know, at present we're not able to gather in person, as the central heating at our church building is not working. We cannot use fan heaters to heat our worship space, as we have in the past, due to issues around air circulation and spreading coronavirus and other winter illnesses. In the past we have moved into the Turner Hall, but its small size makes social distancing impossible, meaning it is not possible for the entire congregation to keep worshipping in person in the building over the winter. Hence, we've moved our services to Zoom until spring 2022.

We know Zoom does not work for everyone, and we've tried having a room at the Northumberland Club in Jesmond for people who are not on Zoom to view services, but it has not worked out. We are now looking at the possibility of using a smaller room on the ground floor of the church for this; we will set up a screen so that people without access to Zoom can join in by attending there. Having a smaller number of people in a smaller room will hopefully make it feasible to both safely heat the space, and keep it properly ventilated whilst maintaining social distancing.

This will be in the New Year as we need the electrical inspections to be complete before we can do this! We will also keep in touch with everyone by phone calls and letters, and I will keep everyone informed about what's happening. I'll be sending out these letters summarising what's happening with services and other aspects of our community life, and offering excerpts from services which I hope you will find interesting.

If you want to get in touch, please call on: 07506 255 731, I'm happy to discuss things anytime.

In fellowship,

Louise Reeve
Chairperson, Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians

October Service Highlights

3rd October – Diana Bebb, the congregation, and ‘Moving On’

This service celebrated the history of our building as we move towards a new stage in its, and our, history. The service video can be seen here:

<https://youtu.be/AykJXhrmdl>. Here is an excerpt from Louise Reeve’s address:

“...We will soon sing our hymn, “The Church is Not Where Altar Stands”. In doing so, we do not reject the importance of buildings or the spirit they embody to our congregation. We acknowledge everything this building has done for us, and for the community it has been part of for so many years. Adult education groups, dance classes, musical and dramatic performances, sports clubs, and Weight Watchers have all met here over the years.

By selling our building to be refurbished so that more people can use it, we are both securing our own future, and giving a gift to the people of Newcastle upon Tyne. We are preserving its history and status as a listed building, and ensuring that a big space in the very heart of this city can be used to benefit our community. This building has served us well as our meeting house and worship space for many years, and now, in addition to this, it will continue to serve us by both continuing to be our meeting place, and helping to secure our financial future. At this point I have to be frank and observe that if nothing else, freeing up the resources that trying to maintain and sell the building has consumed over the years will be a massive boon. I do occasionally wonder whether, if the Trustees who first mooted the idea of selling the building back in the 1990s had known that the Chairperson under whose tenure it would finally be sold was, at that time, just leaving primary school, they would have given the whole thing up as a bad job!

I would like to say thank you to them, too, to the ministers and trustees over the years who have preserved this building and got us to where we are now. And thank you especially to Dr Barry Thomas, Maurice Large, and David Venus for their hard work in recent years.

We do face considerable challenges. As we’ve seen in the past year, keeping our congregation together in a changed world has been at times difficult and draining, but it has also offered us new possibilities. Our mission in future will be to offer a space where all are welcome, where people in Newcastle who are spiritual explorers can join our community in fellowship.

Our forebears commented in the souvenir booklet at the opening of this building: ‘Not the least remarkable thing about this building is that it is here – an accomplished fact. The difficulties which faced minister and congregation when it was realised that the church in New Bridge Street must be abandoned required extraordinary bravery to meet. Those difficulties were

increased enormously by the apprehension of war, and then the tragedy of war itself. And yet, what seemed insurmountable has been surmounted. The wonder church is there.'

Let us become once more a wonder church. Not because of the size and grandeur of our building, magnificent as it is, but by going forward in faith and creativity. Let us lead the way for Unitarianism in the north east, and show Unitarians across the UK that creative solutions can be found to solve complex problems. Let's serve our community by asking ourselves what the spiritual needs of people in Newcastle in 2021 and beyond are, and how we can work with them to meet those needs. Inspired by our own spiritual connection to truth, whether we name it the living God, the divine mystery, the truth within, or something else, let's build on the past to go forward into the future."

10th October – Rev. Sue Woolley and 'The Tree of Faith'

This service was inspired by the 'Tree of Faith' exercise carried out during the Northern Unitarian Association AGM the day before. As part of this, Rev. Woolley offered this prayer, the "Alternative Lord's Prayer:

"Spirit of Life and Love, here and everywhere,
May we be aware of your presence in our lives.
May our world be blessed.
May our daily needs be met,
And may our shortcomings be forgiven,
As we forgive those of others.
Give us the strength to resist wrongdoing,
And the inspiration and guidance to do right.
We are your hands in the world. Help us to grow.
May we have compassion for all living beings,
And may we receive whatever life brings,
With courage and trust.
Amen."

17th October – Anne Mills and "Change"

GA President Anne Mills visited us to give her sermon on Change, as a sequel to our "Moving On" service. The full text of her service is included with this letter.

24th October – Louise Reeve and 'Prison Sunday: Who Goes To Prison?'

On Prison Sunday, Louise Reeve led worship, asking about who goes to prison and why, and how we can work towards a more equal society with

fewer people imprisoned. As part of the service, Ben MacLeod shared his experiences of working in a prison library – here is an excerpt:

“...We are trying to learn the lessons of COVID. The main effect of locking the men up in their rooms for 23 hours a day was that the instances of violence went right down, as they could no longer attack each other. Instances of self-harm went down as the bullied could no longer be put upon. Drug use declined as the drugs could not be circulated as easily.

Our prison is trying to preserve some of these positive impacts of lockdown while still ensuring the men do not suffer illness from lack of physical exercise and social contact. We will not always get it right, but at least we are trying.

The smell of prison will never leave you. It is the smell of damp and fabric softener, of cheap curry powder and frying potatoes. It is the most common, domestic of smells. The kind of smells we were all unable to escape at home during lockdown. But we had the keys to our house. We could get out whenever we wanted. They don't have that choice. We should remember that. The mud sticks for life.”

31st October – Stephen Jackson and “Our Christian Heritage”

Stephen Jackson led worship looking at “Our Christian Heritage”. As part of it, he shared this extract from “I still haven't found what I'm looking for” by Paul Walker:

“...For previous generations, the Church was where you went if you wanted to access God, today it seems to be the last place to look. Yet the decline of Christianity has not led to a decline of interest in things spiritual or religious. People have not all become rational atheists. New Age spirituality is springing up everywhere, alternative medicines are more and more popular, Buddhism is growing exponentially and astrologers even write for ‘serious’ newspapers. People are still searching to make sense of the world, to make sense of their own existence, and seeking to answer for themselves fundamental questions about the purpose of their lives.”