

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarian Fellowship held on Sunday 27 April 2025 at 12.30pm in the Large Spiritual Commons Room, Northumbria Student Central, and online via Zoom

Present:

Members: David Venus (Treasurer), Hazel Warhurst, Jane Simpson (Committee member), Louise Reeve (Secretary and Chairperson). Also present: Norman Moore (observer), Roberta Smith (observer), David Warhurst (observer), Rev. Mark Hutchinson (Unitarian Transformers), John Gill (Unitarian Transformers), Geoff Cook (GCA Financial Planning).

Apologies for absence: Received from Brian Robson.

1. **Opening Act of Worship:** Louise Reeve, Chairperson, lit the chalice and read a short prayer, drawing a parallel between the flickering flame of a chalice and the need for the community to adapt and respond to our environment, while remaining a source of light. All present sang our opening hymn, no. 158 in 'Sing Your Faith': "The Flame of Truth Is Kindled".
2. **Chairperson's Opening Remarks:** As Acting Chairperson, Louise Reeve welcomed everyone to the meeting. She remarked on this being the start of a new future for our fellowship. She expressed thanks to everyone who has worked hard to sustain our congregation over the past year, with especial thanks to David Venus, our Treasurer, for managing our finances, and to Jane Simpson and Brian Robson for their work, noting Brian's long-held roles as our Safeguarding Lead and Northern Unitarian Association Representative. As he has now stepped down from these roles and from the Management Committee, Louise Reeve thanked him *in absentia* for his hard work over the past years.
3. **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting:** The Minutes of the meeting held 28 April 2024, having been circulated to members with the Notice of Meeting, were taken as read and were approved as a correct record with minor amendments to some small errors in the list of those present.
4. **Matters Arising:** No matters arose from the 2024 Minutes.
5. **Annual Report of the Management Committee for 2024-2025 including Worship Supply Report and General Assembly Report:** Louise Reeve presented highlights of the annual report, including a discussion of the fellowship's decision to meet every Sunday in the Large Spiritual Commons Room at Northumbria Student Central. Whilst there are some drawbacks to this – no kitchen, and the room is sometimes difficult to locate – it is easier to reach by public transport on a Sunday morning, and helps to preserve our identity as a Newcastle City Centre church. Whilst Jesmond URC was an excellent venue, it had proven to be more difficult to get to. Louise also discussed the range of worship leaders we have had, and the support for various charities over the past year, including Send A Child to Hucklow, Barnardo's, and the People's Kitchen.

Louise also presented the General Assembly report, mentioning motions passed in support of humanitarian efforts, particularly in Gaza, solidarity with the Unitarian Universalist movement in the USA, and for the General Assembly (the national UK Unitarian and Free Christian movement) to become a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation).

6. **Treasurer's Annual Report and an update on our investments, from Geoffrey Cook.**

- a. David Venus presented the Treasurer's Report, providing an overview of the fellowship's financial situation for the year 2024. He reported a steady income primarily from investments, subscriptions, and donations, with a monthly surplus of around £1,100, detailing our main sources of income and overhead costs. David commented on the relatively healthy state of the congregation's finances at present despite some one-off payments for various expenses, and noted that funds have been set aside for the Unitarian Transformers initiative.
- b. Geoffrey Cook circulated a report on how our investments have performed, and summarised their performance and factors affecting this. He discussed the investments made by the congregation, noting the challenges faced in the market over the past months, and reassured attendees that the chosen portfolio had performed reasonably well given the circumstances. The discussion emphasised the importance of a balanced approach to investing, looking at our goals of a steady income stream, not exposing our capital to too much risk, and ethical investing.

7. **Northern Unitarian Association (NUA) Report:** Louise Reeve presented this, commenting on the work done by the NUA to support Unitarians in the Northern region to attend courses and conferences, and noting that Newcastle and Stockton Unitarians, acting as the member congregations of the NUA, have submitted a joint grant application to Wood Green Trust for a grant of £15K each year for up to three years, to support publicity and outreach work in these locations. We should hear the outcome by 17 May 2025.

8. **Election of Church Officers and Committee members:** The following nominations have been received:

- a. **For Treasurer:** David Venus
- b. **For Secretary:** Louise Reeve
- c. **For membership of the Management Committee (trusteeship):** Jane Simpson

As there were no more candidates than vacancies, all were duly appointed without the need for an election. The **Chairperson** will be elected at the first meeting of the Management Committee following the AGM, on 25 May 2025, as required in our constitution.

9. **Appointment of a representative to the NUA:** Information about what this involves will be circulated, the Management Committee will appoint a representative at the next committee meeting on 25 May 2025, and the fellowship will be informed of who this will be in due course.

10. **Appointment of Safeguarding Lead:** As above – information about what this involves will be circulated, the Management Committee will appoint a Safeguarding Lead at the next committee meeting on 25 May 2025, and the fellowship will be informed of who this will be in due course. We will also carry out an annual safeguarding audit.

11. **Proposed Change to our Constitution (the 'Church Rules'):** The details of this proposed change are set out at the end of these minutes, and were sent out with the agenda. All present read and discussed this. The rationale behind the proposed change is to enable us to keep operating if we cannot find three trustees from within our membership, by co-opting a trustee who is a Unitarian in good standing elsewhere. This means a member of another Unitarian congregation, or a current or retired Unitarian minister or lay worship leader. Such a person would be eligible, but also bound by existing rules of trusteeship as set out in the existing constitution. The four members

present – David Venus, Hazel Warhurst, Jane Simpson and Louise Reeve – voted unanimously to accept the proposal, which was carried, and the constitution will thus be amended.

12. **Social Action – Northern Pride 2025:** This will take place over 19-20 July 2025 in Newcastle. The Inclusive-Minded Churches in Newcastle network will be holding a meeting in May or June to plan events for this, including a possible prayer meeting prior to the start of the march on Saturday 19 July. Tom and Brigitte McCready plan to join us for the march. Louise Reeve will keep everyone informed of the meeting date when it is agreed, and will share details of events when they are known.
13. **Discussion – Looking To The Future – with Rev. Mark Hutchinson and John Gill:** Finally, the meeting looked at future initiatives, including the Unitarian Transformers project aimed at enhancing community engagement. Rev. Mark Hutchinson shared plans for a new spiritual gathering, which would operate outside traditional church settings, aiming to connect with the local community on various levels. Louise Reeve reaffirmed the commitment to maintaining Sunday services while exploring new avenues for community engagement, to meet a wider range of spiritual needs. We will continue this work, looking to appoint someone to lead it in summer 2025, starting in September 2025.
14. **Any Other Business:** None was raised.
15. **Benediction:** Louise Reeve closed the meeting with a benediction, expressing gratitude to all attendees for their participation and contributions.
16. **Close of Meeting:** The meeting closed at 1.45pm.

Louise Reeve
Chairperson and Secretary, Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians
27 April 2025

Approved by all present at the _____ AGM as a true and accurate record.

Signed by _____, Chairperson.

Proposal to change the wording of our constitution (the Church Rules')

Current Rule 4:

Rule 4. The Management Committee shall consist of not less than 3 nor more than 7 elected members, including a Treasurer and Secretary, who shall be members of the Church. The elected members of the Management Committee shall be the Trustees of the Charity. A trustee may not appoint anyone to act on his or her behalf at a meeting of the trustees. No one may be appointed a trustee if he or she would be disqualified from acting as a trustee under the provisions of Rule 6. Application to be a member of the Management Committee constitutes a statement on behalf of the applicant that they are not disqualified under these provisions.

Proposed New Rules 4 and 5:

Rule 4. The Management Committee shall consist of not less than 3 nor more than 7 elected members, including a Treasurer and Secretary, and a majority of its members must always be members of the Church (see Rule 5). The elected members of the Management Committee shall be the Trustees of the Charity. A trustee may not appoint anyone to act on his or her behalf at a meeting of the trustees. No one may be appointed a trustee if he or she would be disqualified from acting as a trustee under the provisions of Rule 6. Application to be a member of the Management Committee constitutes a statement on behalf of the applicant that they are not disqualified under these provisions. To be eligible for membership of the Management Committee, a candidate must be:

- a. A Member of the Church, as set out in Rule 1.
- b. If there are not sufficient candidates who are members of Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians for the management committee to be quorate (not less than 3 trustees) a current or retired member of another Unitarian congregation or fellowship, or a current or retired Unitarian Minister or Lay Worship Leader, shall be eligible to become a Management Committee Member.

Rule 5. If a circumstance arises in which it is not possible for the majority of the Management Committee members to be members of the Church, the Management Committee shall consider if it is appropriate to dissolve the charity under the arrangements set out in rule 32.

The proposal is:

“We propose to revise the wording of Rules 4 and 5 as set out with this AGM Agenda, and thus adopt the revised Constitution, known as the Church Rules, from the date of the Annual Congregational Meeting held on 27 April 2025.”

DRAFT