

Annual Report of the Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians' Management Committee for the year 2024-2025

Introduction

It has been another very busy and challenging 12 months since our last AGM on 28 April 2024, but we are moving forwards.

New home

Over the last 12 months, we tried out meeting at the Large Spiritual Commons Room at Northumbria University Student Central, and the Cuthbert Room at Jesmond URC. Whilst both are good facilities, we eventually decided to meet permanently at the Large Spiritual Commons Room, as it is easiest for people to travel to on a Sunday morning. This has led to increased attendance and more new faces, although there have been some issues with controlled access to the building, but we believe overall the move has been a positive one.

Moving Forwards – CIO and Unitarian Transformers

We have looked at becoming a CIO, as our excepted charity status will end in 2030, and this provides a more secure legal status and limits (but does not remove) personal liability for trustees. We are working with Unitarian Transformers, led by Rev. Mark Hutchinson, to scope out the options for some outreach work, looking to find people within Newcastle upon Tyne who would like to explore their spiritual in a Unitarian way, and find out what would work best for them – perhaps meeting in the evenings, perhaps meeting in coffee shops, perhaps something we have not yet thought of! We will keep everyone informed. We have invested the proceeds of sale of our building to provide income to support this, and have applied for a grant from the Wood Green Trust alongside the NUA and Stockton Unitarians to fund more outreach work in Newcastle and Stockton.

Social Action

We marched at Northern Pride 2024 for the third time. We also continued to make ongoing monthly donations of money, and also coffee, tea, dried milk, men's socks and underpants, and men's toiletries to the Joseph Cowen Centre for homeless men in Byker, named for an MP who regularly attended services at the Church of the Divine Unity.

Charities

We supported various charities in 2024-2025:

- **LIDL Toy Appeal:** We donated toys for children in need in the local area following the Toy Service in December 2024, giving them to the LIDL Christmas Toy Appeal to distribute.
- **People's Kitchen:** Following our Harvest Service in autumn 2024, we asked those attending to donate either funds or goods to the People's Kitchen.

Committee including Worship Calendar

Louise Reeve continued as Secretary, and was elected Chairperson by the management committee. David Venus continued as Treasurer. Committee membership numbered four nominated members throughout 2024-2025: Louise Reeve, David Venus, Jane Simpson and Brian Robson.

Committee took action on the following:

- **Finances and Investments:** We have split the proceeds of the sale of our meeting between the M&G Charifund investment, and the ethical investment fund created for us by Geoffrey Clarke Associates. So far this has provided a steady stream of income.
- **Herbert Barnes Award:** We will shortly be awarding this for 2024 and 2025.
- **Northern Unitarian Association (NUA):** Brian Robson was our fellowship' representative to the NUA during 2024-2025. In October 2024, Louise Reeve became President of the NUA. The NUA AGM took place at Stockton Unitarian Chapel on 28 September 2024.
- **Publicity and Outreach:** We have continued to publicise our services through our website, and via Facebook and YouTube, also via posters at Northumbria Spiritual Commons, and our banner and sandwich board which are on display every Sunday morning.
- **Worship Calendar:** Louise Reeve continued as Worship S. Average attendance at services over 2024-2025 has been 8, including between 3-4 people attending via Zoom and quite a few new visitors! We continue to have a mix of Unitarian Ministers and lay worship leaders, ministers and lay worship leaders from other denominations and other religious traditions including Buddhism. We will soon be offering meditation services from a local meditation and yoga teacher.
- **Safeguarding:** Brian Robson continued as our Safeguarding Officer through 2024-2025.