Newcastle Unitarians
The Calendar



June-July 2026

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A member Congregation of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Articles for the next calendar to be submitted by **Sunday 26 July, 2026**. Thanks to all those who have contributed to this calendar.

Chair's Hello June and July 2026



Summer is well and truly here, and we hope you all enjoyed the hot weather! We've now got the reports from our Annual Meeting on 26 April 2026 at 12.30 in the Large Spiritual Commons Room at Northumbria Student Central: https://tinyurl.com/NUTUAGM2026

Planning for our 'Unitarians in the Community' project, aiming to offer something new in addition to our Sunday gatherings, is well underway! Our Project Lead, Stevie Devlin, has been looking for suitable places to meet, exploring what we might cover, and thinking about who might be interested in joining us.

As a reminder, our plan is that there will be at least one regular weekly spiritual gathering in the day or evening, drawn from a new group of people, and that our Project Lead, Stevie Devlin, will have explored a wide range of opportunities and possibilities for outreach into areas of social action as the project develops.

Feargus O’Connor, one of the originators of the Unitarian Peace Resolution addressing the conflict in the Middle East, in the Middle East, has thanked all who donated to the Red Cross and Save the Children Peace Appeals as follows:

“**Acting in noble spirit**: I have been asked by Save the Children and the British Red Cross to thank all generous Unitarian donors to these charities’ emergency appeals for the victims of the current devastating war in the Middle East in response to our 2026 Annual Meetings emergency resolution on the war in the Middle East and calling on Unitarians to act to save lives.

In addition to the millions whose lives have been disrupted in Iran, the Gulf states and Israel, millions of other vulnerable people in neighbouring countries have fled their homes in search of safety. Huge numbers of people across Lebanon, Gaza, and Syria are in urgent need of food, shelter and medical care. In Gaza itself the scale of humanitarian need remains overwhelming.

Unitarians and all people of faith are called to respond when human dignity is under threat. The suffering in the war-torn Middle East surely

impels us to live our values, believing as we do in the interconnected web uniting all living beings, with steadfast courage, empathy and compassion.

Our twin Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist traditions teach us that every person, and indeed every fellow sentient being, has inherent worth and that love must be made real through acts of mercy and justice.

The Dalai Lama has reminded the world that ‘compassion is not a luxury: it is a necessity’ and he has endorsed the passionate peace pleas by Pope Leo, Religions for Peace, and the World Parliament of Religions and their calls for urgent humanitarian aid for all those caught up in the war. Let us hope that Unitarians, like Quakers, will act in that noble spirit.”

We raised £50 – thanks to all who donated!

July sees the return of Newcastle Pride, and we’ll be marching! Further ahead, September sees Fairtrade Fortnight.

I look forward to seeing everyone soon!

Louise Reeve, Chairperson, Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians

Report from the 2026 General Assembly Annual Meetings



The Annual Meetings this year felt really heartening. We were in a new venue, The Hayes in Derbyshire, which is a not-for-profit Christian centre rather than a more corporate conference hotel, and I do think that changed the feel of the weekend. There was a more spiritual atmosphere: lovely grounds, a lake and a labyrinth for walking and meditation, and a chapel on site. We did have a few teething problems with room bookings, which is inevitable when you try somewhere new, but people were very good-natured about it, and I think everyone could see that we were doing our best. The weekend itself wound together worship, business and fellowship, with Sarah Corbett as keynote speaker and Daniel Costley as the Anniversary preacher.

One of the highlights for me was hosting a newcomers' reception for about twenty of our newcomers. That felt inspiring and really needed. Among the newcomers were people from the

Foundation Worship Studies group, who had worked together online and were meeting in person for the first time to much excitement. Sarah Corbett really inspired us with her gentle approach to “craftivism”, and Daniel Costley and Jane Blackall led an Anniversary Service that felt deeply inclusive, grounded in what unites us, and, wonderfully, also made space for a telling of ‘The Very Hungry Caterpillar’.

The Anniversary Service included time to welcome six new Ministers onto the GA Roll, and a time to hold in our hearts the nine ministers who we have lost this year, a poignant moment of shared grief and gratitude for their service.

Another uplifting moment was the Unitarian College workshop, all of us training for ministry and newly qualified ministers were on stage while the names of all the congregations that have supported us were read out – Ipswich got a mention of course. Other workshops included a brilliant Satsang hosted by the Hindu Connections group, an in-person gathering for the monthly online Facilitators Network, meetings for the Safeguarding Network, Earth Spirit Network, and Social Justice Network.

GA Staff held a number of workshops including Rory Castle Jones' workshop exploring ways to strengthen ministry and leadership and our new Communications Officer Pamela Welsh presenting her strategy, vision and top tips for congregations.

Professor Geoff Levermore ended his time as President and the Bradleys took over – Revs. Jean and Alex Bradley becoming joint Presidents with Jo O'Sullivan as Vice-President. In terms of the formal business, the motions included one that would allow our Chief Officer to issue timely public statements on current events within agreed safeguards; one that named protest as a fundamental Unitarian spiritual practice and challenged recent restrictions on protest; and an emergency motion calling for peace, respect for international law, and humanitarian aid in the Middle East.

So, there was significant and serious business too, as there always is and overall, it was a weekend of real warmth, substance, and meaningful connection.

Lizzie Kingston Harrison

Visiting the Museum of Faith, 7 March 2026 by Louise Reeve



The Museum of Faith is, in its own words “A unique museum exploring 6,000 years of British history through the lens of faith” and to my knowledge, the only one in the UK dedicated to exploring our national history of religious and spiritual practices. As Thomas and Brigitte McCready were visiting the North to lead worship for us on Sunday, we three, joined by visiting Unitarian Roberta Wedge, decided to pay a visit.

The Museum forms part of the Bishop Auckland Project, a massive regeneration project which is clearly having a big influence on the entire town. We spent an interesting afternoon exploring the museum, which, as a potted history of religion in the UK, is a pretty good summary, beginning with what we know of prehistoric spiritual views, and exploring the Roman and Viking eras before the more familiar (to many of us) history of Christianity. It pays due regard to all religions in the UK, including our long history of Judaism and

the arrival of other religions with increased migration in recent centuries.

If you're wondering, Unitarians are not mentioned by name, but Dissenters certainly are, which included us! The Museum is more of an overview of history rather than an in-depth exploration of its different aspects, which, given that it took us over an hour to explore (and you certainly could take longer) is probably about right.

Perhaps in later years, the upstairs gallery space will focus on different aspects of religions in the UK. We enjoyed our visit, and it's worth a trip, although if you are going to go there, I'd recommend arriving early enough to get the most value out of your ticket, which gives you access to other parts of the Bishop Auckland Project. An interesting trip!



A Quaker visit to Newcastle Unitarians



On March 29th, Clare Jackson, Adrian Callander and I attended the Palm Sunday service of Newcastle Unitarians, held in the large Spiritual Commons room of Northumbria University. It was a small gathering led by David Venus, one of the members, as the expected leader was unable to attend.

The service was informal, although it followed a traditional 'hymn sandwich' structure. There were a number of thoughtful poems and readings offered by the the leader and members of the congregation, and an interesting address/reflection on Palm Sunday within the Easter narrative. There was even a period of silent reflection, which sadly was over just as we got going! It made a refreshing change to sing during worship, and we sang four hymns from the Unitarian hymnal ‘Sing Your Faith’.

There was nothing in any of the hymns that made me feel in any way uncomfortable. Likewise, the contemporary version of the Lord’s Prayer which

closed the service. The line 'May we ever turn our eyes towards the light to dispel the darkness, which would engulf us' is reminiscent of a passage we use in Experiment with Light. Worship was followed by tea, coffee, biscuits and fellowship. I wouldn't want to make this my regular place of worship, but I found it spiritually rewarding.

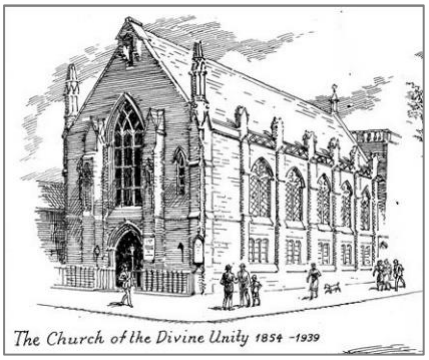
George Callander

A History of Unitarianism in Newcastle (based on the work of Maurice Large)

The Unitarian community in Newcastle upon Tyne can be traced back to the 17th century. In response to The Act of Uniformity in 1662, some clergy, objecting to the imposition of universal creeds, rejected the authority of the Church of England and dissented. Despite the risk of persecution, a number of such clergy set up non-conformist meetings in private homes, often in secret. Both Rev. William Durant and Dr Richard Gilpin separately led such dissenting congregations.

After the death of the Rev. William Durant in 1681, his congregation joined that of Dr Gilpin at the Meeting House just outside the Close Gate,

one of the Gate Towers on the Town Wall. In 1726, a new meeting house, Hanover Square, was built close to the city centre, where they worshipped for 127 years, and it was here that the great William Turner, its minister for nearly 60 5 years (1782-1841), served with distinction. Among his many accomplishments, William Turner established the first Sunday School in Newcastle, in 1784. He was of course also a founding member of the The Literary & Philosophical Society (Lit & Phil), the largest independent library outside London. Under Turner, the congregation moved from Independent Dissent towards Unitarianism.


The Church of the Divine Unity 1854 -1939

In 1854, a grand church, in Gothic style, designed by the notable architect, John Dobson, was opened in the city centre location of New Bridge Street (shown above), where the City Library now stands. In recognition of its Unitarian stance, it was given the name ‘The Church of the Divine Unity’. In 1919, Rev Herbert Barnes, a most inspired preacher, began a ministry there, that lasted for over 30 years. At his Sunday evening services, the church was so over-filled

that extra seats had to be crammed into the aisles to accommodate the congregation.

When the west foundation of the church began subsiding, there was no other option but to demolish it. The most recent building in Ellison Place was erected, to hold a congregation of 500. It was opened on Sunday, 21st January, 1940, where Rev. Barnes continued his ministry.

History of the Church of the Divine Unity building This is a a stunning 500-seater Art Deco building in Ellison Place. All the church furniture was original, made of English oak, with a striking wave design. Robert Burns Dick was in partnership with R. Norman McKellar, who introduced a Modernist direction and contributed to the design. This was probably the last Art Deco building to be built in Newcastle.

The adjoining Durant Hall, became renowned as a lecture hall and meeting place. In 1997, the building was listed Grade II. In 2024, the building was sold to Northumbria University, and the congregation now meets in the University's Large Spiritual Commons room in the Library. The former church will reopen in 2026 as a lecture theatre with attached classrooms.

Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians
Sunday Gatherings: June–July 2026
Northumbria University Large Spiritual Commons Room, and Zoom

June

7 Rev. Paul Walker, ‘It Doesn’t Always Get Better… The Value of Pessimism’, Committee
14 Kainara Motta, ‘Yoga and Non-Stealing’
21 No Service – Whitby Summer Gathering
28 Anne Mills, ‘What We Value Most’

July

5 Kainara Motta, ‘Yoga and Moderation’
12 Louise Reeve, ‘Flower Communion’, Committee
19 Anne Mills, TBC
26 Brigitte and Rev. Tom McCready, ‘Honouring the Past – Celebrating the Present’

Zoom link to join our online services:
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89981324654

Recordings of online services are here:
YouTube: tinyurl.com/NUnitarianYouTube
Facebook: facebook.com/NewcastleuponTyneUnitarians

‘If Only People Knew About Us! Comms Workship”, 18 May 2026, written by Louise Reeve

This was an online version of Unitarian Communications Officer Pamela Welsh’s very successful workship at the Annual Meetings this year, which I wish I’d been able to attend – an article about this from the *Inquirer* can be seen here: https://newcastleunitarians.org.uk/2026/07/06/if-only-people-knew-about-us-comms-workship-18-may-2026/. (I was busy swimming with dolphins in Egypt at the time, and I like to mention this often.) I was especially happy that Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians’ new Unitarians in the Community Project Lead, Stevie, was able to join us, as the two of us and Newcastle’s other trustees have been exploring different options for publicising our events.



Pamela and I have discused Unitarian Communications before, due to some of my earlier work with the now-defunct (or at least, in abeyance…) UniComms Unitarian Communicators’

Network, and I was looking forward to hearing from her again. She began by giving us her biography, then pointing out how she had told this as a story to hook our attention – a neat trick.

We then broke out into small groups, and ask ourselves one of Pamela's 'top three' questions from her big workshop at the Annual Meetings: "What keeps you awake at night?" I'll be honest, this didn't quite work for me as a comms question. What keeps me up at night is the challenge of recruiting new trustees and the fear that if we fail to do so we'll be forced to close.

This to me is more of a second-order question, behind the answer to one of Pamela's other questions: "Ask what makes you come alive!", which is more inspiring and has answers like 'helping people explore their spirituality', 'Summer School, and how we can bring some of its spirit into our daily lives', and 'figuring out what 'God' means to me, and trying to find others who might also be wondering'.

I do think it's a valuable question, and certainly those of us in the break-out group had a deep discussion about this. Overall, a most productive workshop.

Supporting local, national, and international charities

We continue to support various charities in the North East and internationally. We invite anyone who wishes to do so to donate to charities helping those suffering through the war in Ukraine and Gaza, refugees fleeing war, persecution, and natural disasters. Please search online for a charity that speaks to you.

More locally, GAIN is a charity that helps those with autoimmune conditions. Donate online here: justgiving.com/fundraising/geordie-leather



We continue to support the Joseph Cowen Centre, helping homeless men in the city. They need tea, coffee, sugar, powdered milk, men's socks, underpants and toiletries plus paper, pens, puzzle books and playing cards – you can take them to the Byker centre or drop them at our church, or you can make a financial donation online: localgiving.org/charity/tynehousing

Thanks to Norman Moore for suggesting this poem by Christina Rossetti



O ye that taste that
love is sweet,

set waymarks for all
doubtful feet

that stumble on in
search of it.

Sing notes of love: that some who hear

far off, inert, may lend an ear,

rise up and wonder and draw near.

Lead lives of love: that others who

behold your life may kindle too

with love and cast their lot with you.

Christina Georgina Rossetti

About Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians



We are a free religious faith and affirm the unity of the human family, regardless of race, creed, class, orientation, or sex. We believe that peace, compassion, and justice should be the hallmarks of a truly spiritual society, pursued in a spirit of freedom, reason, and tolerance.

The Unitarian Community in this city traces its history back to 1662, when Dr Richard Gilpin and Rev. William Durant started separate Nonconformist meetings after the Act of Uniformity. Under the Rev. Herbert Barnes, our former building in Ellison Place opened on Sunday 21 January 1940.

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