

Bradley Kelly reports on the recent
lay worship training day

More vibrant, more connected: lay worship training day

On Saturday 13 June, Walmsley Chapel hosted a lay worship training day. The North and East Lancashire Unitarian Mission (NELUM) teamed up with Unitarian College to realise the event, which, as I'm sure all who attended will confirm, was a success.



Walmsley Chapel. Photo: Bradley Kelly

The training day was attended by nearly 25 participants, hailing from local congregations linked to NELUM (Bolton, Bury, Padiham, and Kendal) and further afield (Salford, Manchester, and even as far as Scarborough and Newcastle). As a Manchester district congregant, I initially worried about taking resources intended for NELUM members. However, seeing the broad attendance from the north of England gave me confidence that I'd made the right choice and was in the right place.

Our day-long course was led by Unitarian College director Helen Mason and senior tutor Rev. Ant Howe. Their organisation, enthusiasm, and encouragement are boundless. They never fail to inspire me, much like they did when I took part in the Foundation Lay Worship and Leadership course. Their generosity and support really provide that extra confidence when venturing out into new studies... Something that can be quite daunting early on, especially if you aren't familiar with academic activity or lay leadership. Also present



A busy bee during a quiet moment. Photo: Bradley Kelly

– and offering warm welcomes, tea, coffee, and cake – was Rev. Tina Gandhi, who will soon be ordained at Walmsley Chapel as minister. She is an exciting addition to the legacy of such a beautiful chapel.

After welcome teas and coffees, the day started with an opening service in the chapel. Rev. Ant led the group in worship – not only in the pulpit but at the organ too. It was a true masterclass in both delivery and content.

In our group learning session in the church hall, we introduced ourselves and said a few words about why we were there. Answers were as varied as participants. Some were curious, with unclear expectations. Some were eagerly moving through their lay training, willing to soak up knowledge and experiences. Some hoped to impart their own wisdom and experience. There were even mentions of fatigue, possibly due to advancing years or what felt like waning connections within congregations. Sometimes we find ourselves slowing down and feeling unsure for the future, even in our most sprightly days.

The day continued with teaching, where participants feverishly scribbled down nuggets of priceless wisdom. We were offered information on how we might use language, and elements we could draw on, to craft an impactful service. We were advised to speak not just to regular congregants but also to newcomers – remembering how we felt in the tentative moments at our first Unitarian service. We explored the realities of lay ministry, which isn't always straightforward. Leadership comes with times of loneliness, even impacting our own spiritual practices if not well-tended.

Most enjoyable, for me, were the small group exercises where we discussed, bonded, and created, then fed back to the wider group. Each attendant I was lucky to speak with

brimmed with ideas, inspiration, and warmth. Networks were converging, as were potential opportunities to lead services and be more involved in other congregations in the future.

What really made the day worthwhile was our check-out words that were shared as a whole group. These words were offered with gratitude, and harboured excitement for the future. For some attendees who, at the start of the day, brought fatigue or uncertainty, it was a brilliant turnaround. We heard how inspiring the day was for them, igniting hope and connection. We found the sparks to kindle the future of our faith.

It was such a privilege to be part of the day, and to be reunited with familiar faces from my lay ministry training journey. I have faith in the knowledge that the new connections I made that day will converge again in months and years to come – a little more vibrant, and a whole lot more connected.

Special thanks to Anne Mills, NELUM, and Unitarian College for making the day possible. Their intention and passion to pave the way for our future leaders, and strengthen our Unitarian faith, is really exciting to be part of.



Bradley Kelly

Bradley Kelly is a lay ministry student.